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THE BENJAMIN AND ROSE BERGER TORAH TO-GO®

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TISHAB'AV

Dedicated by Rabbi Doniel Z. Kramer in memory of his parents,
Rabbi Meyer and Rose Kramer of Philadelphia PA

הרב מאיר בן הרב חיים מנחם ז"ל ורייזל בת יהודה לייב ע"ה



ישיבת רבנו יצחק אלחנן

Rabbi Isaac Elchanan Theological Seminary

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MOVING ON FROM CHURBAN

Rav Yochanan Ben Zakai instituted several rabbinic enactments to preserve the memory of the Beis Hamikdash within the consciousness of the Jewish people. He believed that the destruction of the Temple was not simply a historical experience that needed to be recorded and recalled, but an event that must animate aspects of our contemporary religious experience.

בראשונה היה הלולב ניטל במקדש שבעה ובמדינה יום אחד משחרב בית המקדש התקין רבן יוחנן בן זכאי שיהא לולב ניטל במדינה שבעה זכר למקדש, ושיהא יום הנף כולו אסור. *In the beginning, the lulav was taken in the Temple all seven days [of Sukkos] and elsewhere on the first day. When the Temple was destroyed, Rav Yochanan ben Zakai instituted that the lulav is taken in all places all seven days as a remembrance for the Temple; [and he instituted] that [chadash (new grain)] is prohibited the entire day of the omer offering. [Although without the Mikdash, chadash should be permitted immediately the morning of the 16th of Nissan, R. Yochanan was concerned that one day, the Mikdash will be rebuilt and chadah will once again be prohibited until the omer offering and people will have been*

accustomed to permitting it first thing in the morning. Therefore, he instituted that it is prohibited the entire day.]

Mishna, Rosh Hashanah 30a

The lulav is now part of our entire Sukkos experience, in order to recreate the spiritual energy of the Temple within the context of our own Diaspora Sukkos observance. The laws of *chadash* and *yashan* must be halachically recalibrated in deference to the ever-present possibility of the Mikdash being rebuilt — at any moment.

While these decrees ensured that we always preserved the memory of the Mikdash through halachic life, they did not address how the Jewish people would relate to the trauma and loss of the destruction of the Temples. The Gemara teaches:

ת"ר כשחרב הבית בשניה רבו פרושין בישראל שלא לאכול בשר ושלא לשתות יין נטפל להן ר' יהושע אמר להן בני מפני מה אי אתם אוכלין בשר ואין אתם שותין יין אמרו לו נאכל בשר שממנו מקריבין על גבי מזבח ועכשיו בטל נשתה יין שמנסכין על גבי המזבח ועכשיו בטל אמר להם א"כ לחם לא נאכל שכבר בטלו מנחות ... פירות לא נאכל שכבר בטלו בכורים ... אמר להן בני בואו ואומר

לכם שלא להתאבל כל עיקר אי אפשר שכבר נגזרה גזרה ולהתאבל יותר מדאי אי אפשר שאין גזרין גזירה על הצבור א"כ רוב צבור יכולין לעמוד בה ... אלא כך אמרו חכמים סד אדם את ביתו בסיד ומשייר בו דבר מועט ... עושה אדם כל צרכי סעודה ומשייר דבר מועט ... עושה אשה כל תכשיטיה ומשיירת דבר מועט.

Our rabbis taught: when the Temple was destroyed, there were many ascetics among the Jewish people who refrained from eating meat or drinking wine. R. Yehoshua approached them and said, "My children, why are you refraining from eating meat and drinking wine?" They said, "We should eat meat from which sacrifices are offered on the Altar and has now ceased? We should drink wine which was used for libations on the Altar and has now ceased? [R. Yehoshua] said to them, "If so, we should not eat bread because the flour offerings have ceased ... We shouldn't eat fruit because bikkurim have ceased" ... He said to them, "My children, come and I will tell you: we can't refrain from mourning altogether because there was a decree against us. We can't have excessive mourning because one cannot impose a decree on the public unless most of the public can keep it ... Rather, our rabbis said that a person

should plaster his house with plaster and leave a small part of it [without plaster].” ... A person can prepare all the needs of a meal but leave over a small amount ... A woman can put on all her jewelry but leave off a small part.

Bava Basra 60b

Rav Yochanan Ben Zakai’s extraordinary leadership expressed itself in navigating a pathway of compromise, which balanced the affirmation of our national trauma with the absolute necessity to confidently move forward in rebuilding our people. Essentially, he conveys that restraint of all material indulgence will cripple our capacity to recover and rebuild from the *churban*. Yet to expel the emotional trauma from our consciousness and life experience denies the extraordinary void that exists within our personal and communal lives. The rabbis, under the leadership of Rav Yochanan Ben Zakai, therefore advances a series of seemingly unrelated mandates that puncture particular moments of progress with a moment of reflection and tangible expression of the loss of the Mikdash. Yet when we look deeper, we can appreciate the common thread among these edicts. They only emerge in the context of personal, communal, and historical progress in moving the Jewish people forward. To encounter these manifestations of national pain, we must find ourselves in the midst of building a new family, building a home, or adorning ourselves for celebration. Rav Yochanan Ben Zakai was guiding and inspiring the Jewish people to never forget their precious Mikdash. But rather than wallow in its demise, we should not lose focus on our mandate and ambitions to progress our people within the *galus* experience.

Am Yisrael has always struggled with *churban* in the context of our

commitment to move our people forward. Tisha B’av, as a day of “*moed*,” embodies this notion as well. Our commemoration of the Mikdash and our history of persecution are always presented within a context of hope and aspiration for a brighter future for Am Yisrael. We need not feel a tension between the observance of Tisha B’av and the rather abrupt re-entry to our contemporary *galus* lives that are, thank G-d, saturated with opportunities for Torah growth, and which enjoy the historically unparalleled and miraculous gift of the State of Israel. Engaging and affirming the progress of the Jewish people is precisely the context within which Rav Yochanan Ben Zakai believed we should memorialize what we have lost. Our memories of *churban* are not intended to constrict our passion and paralyze our progress. Rather, these memories help us recognize what we are striving to rebuild as we move forward with optimism and hope.

In his introduction to the *Achiezer* (published 1922) Rav Chaim Ozer writes:

מחשבות תוגה מתרוצצות בקרב לב חושב:
האם שעת חירום כזאת מכוונה להוצאת
ספרים לאור עולם, הלא ישאל השואל, עם
ישראל טובע בים של דמעות ואתם אומרים
שירה? ... אולם זה כח ישראל סבא לאלקיו
ולתורתו בכל הדורות ובכל התקופות והזמנים,
גם כשחרב חדה היתה מונחת על צוארו,
תורת ד’ היתה שעשועיו כל היום, גם בעת
החורבן אשר כל קיום הלאום היה בסכנה ...
יבנה והחמיה שארית ישראל היתה אוד מוצל
מאש, אשר כעמוד הענן האירו את ישראל
בגולה, על ידם נשמר ונמסר הכתב והקבלה.
*Thoughts of distress should enter the heart
of a thinking person: Is it appropriate
to put out a book in a time of national
emergency? One should really ask: the
nation of Israel is sinking in a sea of tears
and you are reciting celebratory praises?*

... However, this is the dedication of the Jewish people to its Lord and His Torah in all generations and all situations. Even when a sharp sword is resting on its neck, the Torah of HaShem is its enjoyment throughout the day, even in times of destruction where there is a threat to the very existence of the nation ... [During the period of] Yavneh and its scholars, the Jewish people were an ember plucked from the fire which lit up the Jewish people in exile like the Clouds of Glory. Through them, the text and tradition were preserved and passed on.

Rav Chaim Ozer justifies his publication of a Torah work during the unfolding trauma of communal destruction. He saw it as an expression of Rav Yochanan Ben Zakai’s famous choice to preserve the city of Yavneh and the continuity of Torah as the highest ideal within the context of *churban*.

This edition of *Torah to Go* focuses on maintaining *emunah* in times of tragedy and crisis, and chronicles the Jewish people’s journey as a nation that preserves and nurtures its values and ideals, even in the midst of extraordinary persecution. This capacity — not to succumb to the devastation that has been a part of our historical experience, but to reach out and move forward in our faith and Torah observance regardless — is the ultimate secret to our eternal survival. We have incorporated the message of Rav Yochanan Ben Zakai that regardless of our national trauma, we are always moving forward.

May we all find the strength to confront our historical traumas, recognize what we are missing, and summon the courage and fortitude to move our families and communities forward in shaping an inspired future for our people.

Emunah in Difficult Times

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WE ALL RESPOND DIFFERENTLY TO CRISIS

על אלה אני בוכיה עיני עיני ירדה מים כי רחק
ממני מנחם משיב נפשי...

*For these things I weep; my eye, my eye
sheds tears, for the comforter to restore
my soul is removed from me...*

Eicha 1:16

In Judaism, on the one hand, we are given control over our feelings. On the other hand, we are responsible for our emotions. For example, on Tisha B'av we are required to feel sad even if we won the lottery the day before. Purim is a day of happiness, even if we failed the bar exam the previous day. On Shabbos, we are expected to feel a peaceful, tranquil day of rest regardless of the trials and tribulations of the week just passed.

In Sherri Mandel's words in her book *The Road to Resilience*:

One has to prepare oneself with study and actions to be able to transform one's feelings, so they correspond with the spiritual atmosphere of the day. Judaism is a religion that teaches us emotional maturity and control.

On Tisha B'av, we have instructions and expectations that correspond to the "spiritual atmosphere of the day," emotional regulations that demonstrate our belief in our God and our desire to follow His laws. However, what of the days when we do not feel "emotional maturity" and in control of our feelings? What of the days when sadness and despair overcome and overwhelm us but do

not correspond with national days of mourning? Do those moments then represent a lack of faith? Do we have permission to exhibit and express these feelings freely, or not?

For answers to these challenging questions, we turn to Our Creator and His Torah. First and foremost we must remember that Hashem is the One who created us. It is He who instilled in us the capacity to feel all emotions — not only happiness and joy but also sadness, anxiety, confusion, fear, anger, guilt and so on. It is up to us to learn how to express and channel our many emotions and how to best utilize them to serve Hakadosh Baruch Hu, but He certainly understands each person's unique capacity and

proclivity to express these emotions.

While in the midst of a crisis, trauma or tragedy — or any difficult, challenging or sad time — there is no right or wrong way, no prescribed manner that we are required to feel, think, cope or react. Viktor Frankl, a famous psychiatrist who survived Auschwitz, coined the phrase, “an abnormal response to an abnormal situation is totally normal.”

The Torah validated this very point. After Yosef was thrown into the pit, Tragedy 101, when his father and family thought he was killed by wild beasts, five different members of his family reacted in five different ways.

Yaakov Avinu, Yosef’s father, lost Ruach Hakodesh and was steeped in grief for 22 years, until he learned that his beloved son was alive (Bereishis 37:34-35 and Rashi). His brother Reuvain tore *kriah* as an outward sign of mourning (Bereishis 37:29). Yehuda held all his emotions inside until they burst at the next major event in his life (Bereishis ch. 38). Binyamin lived in the past, and named each of his ten sons according to an attribute of Yosef, as Rashi explains in Parshas Miketz (43:30). Yosef himself used his challenges, of which there were so many, to propel himself forward until he was ultimately second to Pharaoh. Five different reactions to the same tragedy. Yet the Torah does not specify that one was right and one was wrong. This is the Torah’s way of teaching us, validating for us, granting us each permission to feel, think, cope and react according to our individual personalities, emotional make ups, resiliency levels, coping skills and connection to the tragedy.

All of the emotions and feelings that we experience in response to crisis, trauma, tragedy and any challenge

— whether it is a designated day for mourning or not — are exhibited by our role models in the Torah. One example, which I refer to often in my work, is the story of Sorah Imeinu’s death after Akeidas Yitzchok. Rav Ephraim Wachsmann notes the midrash (Bereishis Rabbah, Chayei Sorah no. 1) that teaches that the verse in Tehillim 37:18, which states, *yodei’a Hashem yemei temimim* — Hashem knows the days of those who are complete — refers to Sorah. Rashi in Chayei Sorah says about the days of Sorah: *kulam shavim l’tovah* — all of them were equally good. Everything in Sorah’s eyes was as if it was *tamim* — complete, or in Rashi’s words, *l’tovah*, for the good. Sorah Imeinu saw everything as if it was good. However, we can therefore surely ponder, how then is it feasible that Sorah died upon learning of the news of the Akeida? If she thought it was good why did her *neshoma* leave her?

A number of commentaries validate and normalize several emotions, common reactions to difficulties.

Rav Chaim Shmulevitz, *Sichos Mussar, Chayei Sorah 5733*, suggests that Sorah died from shock upon hearing that her beloved son was offered as a sacrifice. Shock is surely a common reaction when we hear of news that is unexpected, and is often a large component of a tragedy.

Rav Chaim Shmulevitz also suggests that Sorah died upon hearing the news of the Akeida because she was alone, and it was too much for her to bear all alone. Avrohom, Eliezer and Yitzchok were together as they walked toward the Akeida. However Sorah was by herself when the angels arrived to deliver the message.

The Chasam Sofer, *Toras Moshe to Chayei Sorah* (pg. 76), states that

Sorah’s *neshoma* experienced a state of euphoria. She was so incredibly happy, because she was extremely connected to Hakadosh Baruch Hu. Sorah recognized that *ratzon Hashem* — the will of God — was being fulfilled through the Akeida. Sorah’s *neshoma* was so overcome with this joy and *dveikus baHashem* — clinging to God — that her body, her physical being could no longer contain her lofty *neshoma*, it therefore left her and she died.

Pirkei D’Rabbi Eliezer, ch. 32, proposes that Sorah was deeply sad. She was mourning and actually cried out in grief in reaction to the news of the Akeida. Sorah’s six shouts of anguish and pain are correlated to the six shouts of the shofar that we are required by the Torah to hear.

The ability to experience conflicting emotions, the heart’s capacity to expand and hold both happy and sad, is a struggle many grapple with following a crisis. This idea is also validated by the commentators. Sorah experienced tremendous anguish, pain and grief, yet at the same moment she also experienced a genuine joy, fulfillment and connection to Hashem. In Avrohom Avinu’s eulogy for his beloved wife Sorah, which is Mishlei ch. 31 (*Midrash Tanchuma, Chayei Sorah* no. 4) — commonly known as *Eishes Chayil* (Mishlei ch. 31) sung by many on Friday nights — he says *vatischak l’yom acharon* — she laughed until her last day. We again learn from here that even in her last day, during her most difficult moments, hearing that her son Yitzchok was brought to the Akeida which made her understandably so, so sad, she was still so, so happy. Both Sorah’s extremes were correct, valid, and understood by Hashem.

In fact this very story is read on Rosh Hashana, a day in which our faith in Hashem and our reaffirmation of His kingship are stressed, while we are reminded of our vulnerabilities as well.

The story of Sorah's death after the Akeida is but one example of many that allow us to express emotions without the concern that they deny our faith. The spectrum of emotions and feelings that we are capable of are found and validated in the Torah: loneliness, confusion, anger, guilt, fear, sadness etc. It is essential and should potentially be a source of comfort and strength to internalize the notion that perhaps one reason Hashem incorporated these stories is so that we do feel validation, permission to process our feelings, thoughts, and reactions following challenging times. Yes, Hashem expects us to channel those feelings back toward Him but He knows they are not due to a lack of faith or belief in Him.

In that same vein, it is incumbent upon us to grant permission, to create a comfortable, safe place for expression of emotions not only for ourselves, but for others as well. Too many youngsters, as well as adults,

stray away from religious observance when they are chastised for asking questions or expressing emotions following a trauma or tragedy.

Creating appropriate avenues of expression is not only halachically permissible but is following in Hashem's ways. The very same Rambam who codified the rules of mourning also penned an emotionally laden and mournful letter following the death of his brother.

As religious Jews, prayer is our conduit to Hashem during good times and in sad and difficult times. However, even then, Hashem understands that approaching Him, praying to Him may be challenging. Hashem's message to us during those moments is: I am here for you and with you — just approach me, I don't care how, just come, even amidst your pain, even if it's not a delegated national day of mourning. Each one in your own way, choose your own pathway.

Rav Shimshon Pincus's sefer *She'arim B'tefillah*, Pathways to Prayer, based on statements of Chazal, delineates ten different avenues in which we can approach Hashem when feeling despondent. Each pathway is not only valid, but is a unique way we can

channel our emotions and feelings toward a closer connection with Hashem. Each is a manifestation of faith, not a lack thereof.

The ten pathways to prayer are: *bitzur* — calling out in distress; *sha'ava* — hysterical outcry; *tze'akah* — wordless scream; *ne'akah* — groaning; *rina* — joy, song or praise; *pegiah* — relentless entreating; *keriah* — calling out; *nipul* — throwing oneself down; *pilul* — prayer; *tachanunim* — begging for grace.

בכו תבכה בלילה ודמעתה על לחיה אין לה
מנחם מכל אהביה כל רעיה בגדו בה היו לה
לאיבים.

*She weeps, yea she weeps in the night,
and her tears are on her cheek; she had
no comforter among all her lovers, all
her friends have betrayed her, they have
become her enemies.*

Eicha 1:2

On Tisha B'av we cry and all cry together with us. When our tears flow on other occasions, knowing that Hashem understands and validates all of our emotions and will ultimately wipe all our tears, is the greatest *nechoma* of all. *Umacha Hashem dimach me'al kol panim*, may Hashem wipe the tears from all our faces, speedily in our day.



Emunah in Difficult Times

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Rabbi Kramer is a retired Army Reserve chaplain, and has completed 40 years as a VA healthcare chaplain. Born in Philadelphia, he received his BA, MA and Ph.D. degrees and Rabbinic ordination at Yeshiva University and RIETS. He has also been a synagogue/community rav, a college instructor and is a past National Director of the UJA Rabbinic Cabinet.



EMUNAH IN THE FACE OF TRAGEDY: A CHAPLAIN'S PERSPECTIVE

As a retired military chaplain and an active healthcare chaplain, I was asked to write about “maintaining emunah in the face of tragedy” from a chaplain’s perspective. What is a chaplain? Wikipedia defines chaplain as: “...a cleric (such as a minister, priest, pastor, rabbi, or imam), or a lay representative of a religious tradition, attached to a secular institution such as a hospital, prison, military unit, school, business, police department, fire department, university, or private chapel.” Historically, the term “chaplain” was generally used to refer to clergy in the military. Since the government

is responsible for ensuring that the full social structure in civilian life — including religious guidance and practice — is available to military personnel and their families, chaplains, including Jewish clergy, are an integral part of military life. In that context, rabbis play a unique role. While many Jews grew up in a Jewish milieu, with family or Jewish institutions nearby, the number of Jews on any particular military base or ship or site can be very small. Contact with a Jewish chaplain is therefore precious because it gives a Jew the feeling that he or she is not alone. The ability of a Jewish chaplain to reach out and impact

the lives of such Jews is inestimable. “Kiruv” within the military setting by a chaplain (and family) can be especially effective. Practically all chaplains have stories about how they influenced the religiosity of soldiers in a most positive sense. In times of war or even just being assigned to a place of conflict, the presence, prayers and support of a chaplain strengthens and restores faith in times of fear and fright.

The story of U.S. Navy Chaplain Arnold Resnicoff is but one example of the challenges facing chaplains. While stationed with the Sixth Fleet in Italy, he was sent to Beirut, Lebanon, during the Lebanon Civil

War to lead a Friday Memorial Service for an American Jewish marine who had been killed there by sniper fire. Rabbi Resnicoff was offered transportation back to his ship the next day, but would not travel on Shabbat and stayed with the marines in Beirut. On early Sunday morning, Oct. 23, 1983, the marine barracks where he was staying was blown up by an Islamic terrorist truck bomb, killing 241 U.S. and 58 French peacekeepers. Chaplain Resnicoff survived the bombing and assisted in the rescue of wounded marines. This was a great Kiddush Hashem. When Rabbi Resnicoff used his own kippah to wipe the blood from an injured marine's face, a fellow chaplain, a Catholic priest, tore off a piece of his own camouflage uniform and fashioned a kippah for Rabbi Resnicoff to wear during his rescue efforts.

Chaplain Resnicoff survived, but other chaplains made the ultimate sacrifice, such as Rabbi Alexander Goode, one of four chaplains on the U.S.A.T. Dorchester army transport ship that was torpedoed by the Germans during World War II in the North Atlantic. These four chaplains — a Jew, a Methodist, a Roman Catholic and a Dutch Reformed — each voluntarily gave up their life jackets so that other soldiers could be saved. As the ship was sinking, the chaplains prayed while they went down with the ship, their arms linked together in their final moments of life, while the survivors in nearby rafts were spiritually transformed as they witnessed this heroic act of faith. (A monument was dedicated in Arlington Cemetery on Oct. 24, 2011, to memorialize 14 Jewish chaplains who died while on active military duty.)

Indeed, throughout Jewish history, Jewish leaders have provided such

faith and succor in the face of fear, even if the title may have been different. Yirmiyahu — Jeremiah — was the prophet who not only led the lament of our People at the time of the destruction of the first Holy Temple and the exile of the Jewish People from the Holy Land, but he also — chaplain-like — provided hope that all was not lost. He composed Eichah — Lamentations, but he also assured the Jewish People that they would survive in the Exile and return to the Holy Land (e.g., Jer. 29: 4-14).

When Rabbi Resnicoff used his own kippah to wipe the blood from an injured marine's face, a fellow chaplain, a Catholic priest, tore off a piece of his own camouflage uniform and fashioned a kippah for Rabbi Resnicoff to wear during his rescue efforts.

This reference to Jeremiah is especially poignant during this Tisha B'Av season when we read his book of "Lamentations." Even his name has been transformed into a sorrowful English word — **jeremiad** — translated by Webster as "a prolonged lamentation or complaint." In reality, Jeremiah has been my chaplain model because each of his calamitous predictions and prophecies are followed by words that hold out hope for

repentance and restoration. Jeremiah beckons us to repent and avoid actions that are destructive — either physically, morally or ethically — and warns about their severe consequences, and yet offers some concluding words of comfort. Even more than Yeshayahu (Isaiah), whose chapters of dire warning and chapters of comfort are separate sections of his Biblical book, in Jeremiah, these contradictory messages are complementary.

If I have a patient whose living standards could be injurious — such as an unhealthy lifestyle or substance abuse — we would discuss their negative impact and their harmful effects, and always hold out the possibility of a lifestyle change for the better.

One of the primary roles of the prophets was to rebuke the nation for their wrongdoings. When we think of "rebuke" we may think of fire and brimstone, but that is not what rebuke is about. Rebuke is about bringing people closer to God. The Talmud (*Arachin* 16b) states that while fire and brimstone may have worked in previous generations, we aren't adept at providing this type of rebuke. Indeed, Maimonides (*Deiot* 6:7) states that rebuke is most effective when one speaks in a soft tone and explains to the listener that change is in the best interest of the listener. This is not only an important tool for chaplains, it is an important tool for anyone who wants to help a friend or family member change.

Verily, one of Jeremiah's most startling teachings has practical halakhic applications. Jeremiah's life was dedicated to convincing the Israelites to repent of their idol worship and

sinful ways so that they could remain in the Holy Land and not face exile. Yet after the exile of the Jewish People from the Holy Land, he didn't resign in failure, but instructed the Jews to:

וְדַרְשׁוּ אֶת שְׁלוֹם הָעִיר אֲשֶׁר הִגְלִיתִי אֶתְכֶם
שָׁמָּה וְהִתְפַּלְלוּ בְּעֵדָה אֵל ה' כִּי בְשָׁלוֹמָה יִהְיֶה
לְכֶם שְׁלוֹם.

Seek the welfare of the city where I have caused you to be carried away captive and pray to the Lord for it, for with its peace, you shall have peace.

Jeremiah 29:7

This verse is the basis of the halakhic teaching in *Avot* (3:2):

הוּי מִתְפַּלֵּל בְּשִׁלוּמָהּ שֶׁל מַלְכוּת, שֶׁאֵלֵּמָּלָא
מִוְרָאָה, אִישׁ אֶת רַעְהוּ חַיִּים בִּלְעָן.

Pray for the welfare of the government, for were it not for the fear of it, people would swallow one another alive.

Alas, many synagogues omit this prayer for the welfare of the government — “*Hanotain teshuah lamelachim*” or a similar petition, and perhaps the sad result is a lack of appreciation for our country. We should also be appreciative of our military service members and their chaplains, who are following Jeremiah's commandment to seek to preserve the well-being of our country as its peacekeepers!

As noted, Jeremiah is also a guide for chaplains in a hospital or healthcare setting. They are often called upon to caringly minister to sick and dying patients and their families whom

they do not know at all. Chaplains quickly bond with their frightened and scared patients who are so in need of their prayers, guidance and company. The chaplain invites the patient/family to share their honest and heartfelt feelings, and encourages them to express their fears, concerns and hopes — be they from a spiritual, religious or purely personal perspective — and the chaplain seeks to validate them. For religious questions, depending upon the faith and observance level of the patient/family, the chaplain may address theological concerns or discuss halakhic queries and try to offer appropriate guidance for that patient. Often, this may be the first occasion for these patients to fully confront intimate life and death issues. Sometimes it can be easier for people to discuss such personal matters of faith and belief objectively with a healthcare chaplain than with their own rav or spiritual leader, who may be too close to be able to step back and consider a broader perspective.

Usually a chaplain can discern that though a question or comment may initially be couched in theological terminology, the patient is not really looking for a philosophical or religious treatise, but rather is seeking a representative of God who can be a sacred presence merely by being there to listen to and walk with the patient to wherever his or her feelings may

lead. It is really the chaplain's presence and heartfelt personal prayer — not preaching — that are most cathartic. In the sixth chapter of *Avot*, one of the 48 methods for acquiring Torah is *nosei b'ol im chaveiro*, carrying some of the burden of one's friend. In modern terms, this is called empathy, and it is a recognition that sometimes just being there for someone in a time of need can be more therapeutic than any words. This idea expresses itself in a halakha related to paying a shiva call. The visitors are not supposed to start a conversation with the mourner, but rather should wait for the mourner to start the conversation (*Yoreh De'ah* 376:1). It is a recognition that sometimes that mourner feels more comforted by the presence of visitors without having a conversation.

Using empathy, trained Jewish chaplains can be especially impactful when they can visualize the Tzelem Elokim present in every person, and can truly be Mekadaish Shem Shamayim (sanctify God's name) when caringly assisting all people — regardless of their religion or faith.

In *Pirkei Avot* 4:13, Rabbi Eliezer ben Yaakov teaches that if we perform even one mitzvah, “*koneh lo praklit echad*,” we acquire an angelic intercessor, according to the Bartenura. The *Tiferet Yisrael* commentary there further elaborates and teaches that through our good deeds and mitzvah observances, we can transform



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ourselves to be like a Divine angelic being. I never realized the power of this teaching until the following true story occurred. It was my most overpowering chaplaincy experience — seeking to instill “emunah in the face of tragedy” — for Jews and Gentiles alike, and finding myself most humbled and overwhelmed in return.

Active members of my synagogue’s Sisterhood met weekly in the home of Grace, where she had a kiln, and they enjoyed a ceramics-making class. Grace was a devoted church-going Catholic who appreciated religious commitment, and she therefore especially enjoyed her friendship with my Sisterhood members — because of their devotion to their House of God.

Shelley, my Sisterhood president, lived across the street from Grace, and their families were good and close friends. Grace and her husband Lester often supported Sisterhood fund-raising projects to benefit my congregation, and I got to know them well. Lester was an army veteran, and he eventually was hospitalized in the nearby VA Hospital where I was the part-time Jewish chaplain. I therefore regularly visited Lester during my hospital rounds. Lester’s condition was failing, and one particular morning I visited him and noticed how he had weakened. An hour later, an emergency code was announced over the hospital’s loudspeakers. I recognized the room number as being Lester’s. He had a massive heart attack and was pronounced dead by the time I entered the room.

Lester’s doctor was assigned to this unit to minister to many elderly and fragile patients who often died in the hospital, and this doctor seemed to me to be somewhat emotionally distant from and unmoved by his patients’ conditions. The

doctor matter-of-factly announced: “I’ll have to call this vet’s wife and tell her that her husband died.”

I knew that the doctor would share that news in an impersonal, cold manner. I also knew that Grace, who was not well herself, was home alone, since I had called her after seeing her husband earlier that morning. I knew that it would be devastating and potentially fatal to Grace if the doctor made this call now. I told the doctor that Grace’s condition was such that she couldn’t take that call now alone. I asked him to give me an hour to try to reach a close friend of Grace’s to be with her at this time. Fortunately, Shelley was home, and I told her of Lester’s death (this was before HIPAA), and that the doctor would be calling Grace soon with the news. Shelley immediately agreed to go over and visit Grace, which was not unusual for her. During Shelley’s visit to Grace, the doctor called and gave Grace the news about her husband’s death. Shelley was able to provide Grace with the emotional support that she needed at the dreadful moment.

When I visited Grace later that afternoon in her home, still grief-stricken and surrounded by family and friends, including Shelley, Grace told us that “an angel of God miraculously sent Shelley to me this morning.” With her innate

faith, Grace truly believed that God finds a way to provide assistance when most needed. With real faith in God, Grace was sure that a Divine-ministering angel had sent Shelley — who had not been to her home for a week — to visit her that very morning in order to be there when her presence was most needed.

Grace kept on telling visitors, “An angel of God miraculously sent Shelley to me this morning.” Grace never found out that I was that “angel of God.”

One need not be a chaplain to be “an angel of God.” We all have the capacity of love within us to emulate God — *Imitatio Dei*.

Israelis are still exploring what the best Hebrew translation of “chaplain” should be. “*Melave ruchani*” — “a spiritually guiding companion” is the preferred definition for many.

May we all be privileged to be angels of God, spiritually guiding with Divine inspiration.

I am especially honored to dedicate this *Torah To-Go* issue in memory of my dear parents: Rabbi Meyer (d. 7 Tammuz) and Rose (d. 3 Tishrei) Kramer, a”h. They were angels of God who inspired me and so many others to remember that we are all created with the Image of God. *Yehi zichram baruch*.





MAINTAINING FAITH AMID NATIONAL AND PERSONAL SUFFERING

Why do some tzadikim suffer? The Gemara (*Brachos 7a*) relates that Moshe asked Hashem this question, and that Hashem answered: an incomplete tzadik suffers.

The Maharsha explains that an “incomplete tzadik” suffers to atone for his few sins, become pure, and merit greater reward in Olam Haba.

Crisis is a Call for Repentance

Earlier (5a), the Gemara charges one who suffers to investigate his deeds, as it says (*Eicha 3:40*), “Let us search and examine our ways and return to

Hashem.” We must recognize that evils decrees come from Hashem. We should not complain, but attribute our punishment to our sins (3:38, 39), recognize them, and repent (40). (Rashi)

The Rambam (*Taaniyos 1:1-3*) discusses a Torah commandment to cry out to Hashem when trouble besets a community:

שבזמן שתבוא צרה ויזעקו עליה ויריעו ידעו הכל שבגלל מעשיהם הרעים הורע ... וזה הוא שיגרום להסיר הצרה מעליהם. אבל אם לא יזעקו ולא יריעו אלא יאמרו דבר זה ממנהג העולם אירע לנו וצרה זו נקרה נקריית. הרי זו דרך אכזריות וגורמת להם להדבק במעשיהם

הרעים. ותוסיף הצרה צרות אחרות. הוא שכתוב בתורה והלכתם עמי בקרי והלכתי גם אני עמכם בחמת קרי.

When they cry out they will all realize that evil befalls them because of their misdeeds. They will repent ... and this causes the crisis to end. But if they attribute the problem to chance, it is a way of cruelty and causes them to cling to their evil ways, and suffer even greater troubles, as it is said (Vayikra 26:27, 28), “If despite this (punishment) you will not listen to Me, and you relate to Me if it is by chance, I will relate to you with fury.”

Fasting is a rabbinic extension of this mitzva (1:4) and applies to

an individual's crisis as well (1:9). Tisha B'av, and the three other fasts (Zecharia 8:19), remind us of our sins and the sins of our ancestors that resemble ours, which caused the tragedies which took place on those days. These fasts must awaken our hearts and lead us to teshuva (5:1-4).

Apparently, our sins cause the continuation of the state of destruction of the Bais Hamikdash, which took place, twice, on Tisha B'av. The Yerushalmi (*Yoma* 1:1) states that every generation in which the Bais Hamikdash is not rebuilt, it is as if it was destroyed then. Presumably, if we would correct the sins that caused the churban, the Bais Hamikdash would be rebuilt. Hence, we fast over our sins, as well as the similar sins of our ancestors, which perpetuate the state of churban.

The Neviim, and later Chazal, named specific sins that would, and did, cause the Bais Hamikdash to be destroyed. The Gemara (*Yoma* 9b) names *sinas chinam* (baseless hatred) as the cause of Churban Bayis Sheni. If so, we must correct this sin to merit the third Bais Hamikdash.

The Gemara (*Kiddushin* 39b) interprets the rewards of a long and good life for fulfilling mitzvos (D'varim 5, 16; 22, 7) as referring to Olam Haba, not this world. Failure to recognize this led Acher, once a great sage, to question reward and punishment and this put him on a path towards heresy. Remarkably, the Yerushalmi (*Pe'ah* 1:1) states that there is no automatic correlation between mitzvos and immediate reward, in order to compel us to perform mitzvos with faith. Instant reward and punishment would curtail the exercise of free will. Tragically, Acher lacked this faith and became a heretic.

Understanding National Tragedies

National tragedy led to the loss of faith as well. The Gemara (*Sanhedrin* 105a) records a conversation in the aftermath of Churban Bayis Rishon. "The Navi says repent, and ten people respond: A servant who was sold by his master, does the master still have a claim on him? Since Hashem sold us to Nevuchadnetzar and banished us, can He still demand that we serve Him?" (Rashi). Hashem responds (*Yechezkel* 20:32, 33): "What enters your minds will not be. That you say we will be like the nations to worship wood and stone ... I will rule over you with a strong hand and with an outstretched arm and with outpoured fury." The term "fury" echoes the fury of the *tochacha*, rebuke, when Am Yisrael views tragedy as a coincidence, or, in this case, as an abandonment. The proper response is to recognize Hashem's Providence and call to teshuva.

Tisha B'av commemorates subsequent national tragedies (Rashi, *Divrei Hayamim* 2:35:25 see Artscroll *Kinno* p. 270 quoting R. Yitzchok Zev Soloveitchik). R. Soloveitchik's nephew, R. Yosef Dov, quoted the same source and reached the same conclusion, namely, that Tisha B'av is the day to commemorate the Holocaust as well.¹ Indeed, in many shuls it is included in the *Kinno* (see Artscroll p. 384-388).

At the beginning of *Kol Dodi Dofek*, the Rav zt"l views speculation about suffering as futile and counterproductive. We cannot know why the righteous suffer.² Instead, we must ask what we should do in response.³ Woe unto the person who suffers and does not grow from the experience.⁴

Of course, growth and teshuva demand introspection. Both individuals and nations must examine their deeds and find ways to improve.

The Ramban (*Vayikra* 26:11) notes the repetitive reference to the land in both the blessings and curses. They apply to the nation as a whole. When a catastrophe strikes an individual, it does not evoke wonderment, which is normal for all nations. But when all of Am and Eretz Yisrael are cursed, all will wonder:

וְאָמְרוּ כָּל הַגּוֹיִם עַל מֶה עָשָׂה ה' כְּכֹה לְאֶרֶץ
הַזֹּאת מֶה חָרִי הָאֵף הַגָּדוֹל הַזֶּה. וְאָמְרוּ עַל
אֲשֶׁר עֲזָבוּ אֶת בְּרִית ה' אֱלֹהֵי אֲבוֹתָם אֲשֶׁר
כָּרַת עִמָּם בְּהוֹצִיאָם אוֹתָם מֵאֶרֶץ מִצְרַיִם. וַיִּלְכוּ
וַיַּעֲבְדוּ אֱלֹהִים אֲחֵרִים וַיִּשְׁתַּחֲוּוּ לָהֶם אֱלֹהִים
אֲשֶׁר לֹא יִדְעוּם וְלֹא חָלַק לָהֶם. וַיַּחַר אֵף ה'
בְּאֶרֶץ הַהוּא לְהַבִּיא עֲלֶיהָ אֶת כָּל הַקְּלָלָה
הַכְּתוּבָה בְּסֵפֶר הַזֶּה.

"Why did Hashem do so to the land? Why this fury?" They will say "because they forsook the bris ... they served other gods ... So Hashem was furious and brought about the curse."

D'varim 29:23-26.

The curses of *Vayikra* and *D'varim* refer to the Churban Bayis Rishon and the Churban Bayis Sheni, respectively (Ramban *Vayikra* 26:16). They reflect the behavior of the masses (Ramban *D'varim* 11:13). Countless tzadikim perished during each Churban and during the subsequent tragedies commemorated on Tisha B'av, many of which took place or began on Tisha B'av itself.

Beitar was conquered on Tisha B'av (*Ta'anis* 26a), and millions were killed. The expulsion from Spain occurred on Tisha B'av, 1492, and many gave their lives then and during previous Inquisitions. World War I began on Tisha B'av, 1914, costing many Jewish lives, and ultimately leading to the Holocaust and six million martyrs.⁵

In each case, rabbinic leaders exhorted the survivors, local and global, to strengthen their faith and observance. Often, they suggested teshuva for specific sins,⁶ while recognizing that many of the martyrs were tzadikim. Presumably, they followed the aforementioned Ramban that national tragedies are punishment for shortcomings of the masses, but claim innocent lives as well. The righteous and/or innocent children are caught up in the generation (*Shabbos* 33b), i.e. punished for the sins of the masses.

Moreover, as the Rav, zt"l, explained, our introspection is not for the purpose of determining *why* the national tragedy took place, but for the purpose of discovering *what* we can do to improve ourselves and what areas require teshuva:

על האדם לפתור לא את שאלת הנימוק
הסיבתי או התכליתי של הייסורים בכל
תסבוכתה הספקולטיבית כי אם את שאלת
תיקונם בכל פשטותה ההלכתית על ידי
הפיכת הגורל ליעוד והעלאת עצמו מאובייקט
לסובייקט מחפץ לגברא.

Man must solve, not the question of the causal or teleological reason for suffering with all its speculative complexity, but rather the question of its curative role, in all its halakhic simplicity, by turning fate to destiny and elevating himself from object to subject, from thing to man.

Kol Dodi Dofek pg. 16

Tragedy as a Source of Emunah

Often, a subsequent event was viewed as a message from Hashem that He has not, and never will, abandon Am Yisrael. When the corpses of the Beitar massacre were preserved and buried, Chazal instituted the bracha of *Hatov V'Hameitiv* into Birkas Hamazon (*Brachos* 48b). The

political and military miracles in Eretz Yisrael in the immediate aftermath of the Holocaust and beyond must be viewed as Divine Providence, enabling Am Yisrael to survive and thrive after unspeakable and unprecedented calamity.⁷

The idea of *hester panim*, the concealment of Hashem's face, is invoked as early as the period following Churban Bayis Rishon (*Chulin* 139b). This in no way detaches tragedy from sinful behavior (see *Yoma* 9b). In context (D'varim 31:18), Hashem hides His face because of the sins of Am Yisrael; again, many tzadikim suffer in such tragedies.

Our introspection is not for the purpose of determining *why* the national tragedy took place, but for the purpose of discovering *what* we can do to improve ourselves.

The eternity of Torah commandments and their binding nature was questioned as early as the time of Yechezkel, when we were "sold" to Nevuchadnetzar, and as recently as the Holocaust when we were "sold" to Hitler and the Nazis. Hashem's aforementioned response, that He rules over us forever, and therefore that Torah and mitzvos are binding forever, must be taught and reinforced.⁸

When individuals suffer, if they "kick,"

their pain doubles (*Tana D'be Eliyahu* 2), just as Am Yisrael's travails increase when they attribute their curses to chance. But if we view suffering as Hashem's calls to teshuva, it atones for our sins (*B'rachos* 5a) and enhances our Olam Haba (*P'nei Yehoshua*). As the Rav writes (*Kol Dodi Dofek* p. 13-14), pain should elevate us, purify and sanctify us. From the crisis itself we are saved, awakened to repent and renew ourselves.

When many *ra'os* (evils) and *tzaros* (troubles) befalls us, we respond, "Because Hashem is not in our midst, these evils befall me." (*Devarim* 31:17) When we recognize that evils come from Hashem, they are no longer considered troubles (Rav Schach, *Avi Ezri*: Introduction to *Nashim*, written in besieged Yerushalayim in May, 1948).

As the Rav writes (*Kol Dodi Dofek* p. 11), human comprehension is limited. We see only snippets of history. Only seeing the whole picture enables us to understand suffering and its purpose.

The Chasam Sofer (*Toras Moshe* Shemos 33:23) writes that the Torah hints at this idea. "You will see My back, but My face cannot be seen." In real time (My face), we cannot understand, and we wonder, "Why did Hashem do this?" Only in retrospect (My back) can we see the purpose of events. Sometimes, as in the story of Purim, it becomes clear a few years later. Until then, we must have faith that everything has a purpose. Often, the purpose of suffering, personal and national, remains a mystery, to be revealed only at the end of days. Until then, we must have faith that what seems bad comes from the Judge of the Truth and that ultimately the good will be revealed.

In this world, therefore, we bow our

heads when confronting death and bad tidings, and recite Baruch Dayan Ha'emes, expressing our faith that Hashem's judgment is true. In the next world, however, we will say on bad tidings, as on good ones, "Hatov V'hameitiv." (*Pesachim* 50a) Only then can and will we understand that all we perceive now as bad, is, and retrospectively, was for the good.

The *Be'er Yosef* (*Parashas Vayelech* pg. 308) illustrates this idea with a moshol. A city boy thought that bread grew from the ground. He visited a farm, and saw the field being plowed. How destructive, he thought. Then he saw seeds being buried. How wasteful, he felt. When vegetation emerged, he realized his mistake. The purpose was to plant a beautiful garden. But then, the farmer cut down all the wheat. Now he was really confused. His confusion increased as the grain was threshed, ground, kneaded and thrown into a fire. Only when the bread emerged did he realize the positive purpose of all the apparently destructive acts.

The *Me'am Loez* (*Shoftim* 6:12) cites a story of a disciple of the Ramban who was dying. The Ramban requested that he inquire in Heaven about the suffering of Am Yisrael, and relate the answers to him in a dream. When the disciple appeared to the Ramban in a dream, he said: "When I wanted to ask your question, I saw that there are no questions in the world of truth, as all is done with righteousness and justice."

Yerushalayim: Truth and Peace

As we remember and bemoan the trouble and calamities that Am Yisrael suffered with the destruction of the Batei Mikdash on Tisha B'av, and are mindful of the tragedies, national and personal, we await and pray for the final redemption, when Tisha B'av will become a holiday. As Zecharia (8:19) prophesied, the four fasts that mark the four stages of Churban Bayis Rishon will be days of joy, happiness, and good holidays.

The pasuk ends: Love truth and peace, as conditions of redemption. Yerushalayim is a compound word. Shem, Malki Zedek (B'reishis 14:18) called it Shalem. Avraham called it (Hashem) Yir'eh (22:14). So neither should complain; Hashem combined both names and called it Yerushalayim (*B'reishis Rabba* 56:16).

The *Meshech Chochma* (B'reishis 22:14) explains that Shem, who witnessed the theft and evil character that caused the mabul, focused on interpersonal improvement. Hence, he called his capital Shalem, to emphasize perfecting character and peace. Avraham discovered Hashem and His Providence, and focused on spreading monotheism to others. Hence, he called his capital (Hashem) Yir'eh, to emphasize the existence and omniscience of the Almighty. Therefore, Hashem called His capital Yerushalayim, to emphasize the need for both *bein adam lamakom* and *bein adam lachavero*.

If either of the fundamental principles of Yerushalayim is violated, the city cannot stand. The first Bais Hamikdash was destroyed because of *avoda zara* (*Yoma* 9b), the opposite of truth. The second Bais Hamikdash was destroyed because of *sinas chinam* (*ibid.*), the opposite of peace. It is, therefore, no wonder that the condition for the rebuilding of the Bais Hamikdash is that we love truth and peace.

Each of us can advance the *ge'ula* by adhering to these sacred and eternal values. May we thereby merit the final redemption, and, ultimately, understand the role of personal and national suffering as part of Hashem's goodness. May Tisha B'av become a Yom Tov — *b'mhera b'yamenu Amen*.

Endnotes

- 1 *The Lord is Righteous in all His Ways* p. 213, 289, 299, 300.
- 2 *Divrei Hagut VeHa'aracha* p. 11, 12.
- 3 *Ibid*, p. 13.
- 4 *Ibid*, p. 14-15.
- 5 See *Artscroll Tisha B'av* p. 157, 158.
- 6 For example, *Or Hachaim*, end of Chap. 5, attributing the expulsion from Spain to improper philosophical study. The Crusades were linked to viewing Germany as a permanent Home. *Meshech Chochma* (*Vayikra* 26:44) predicted catastrophe, since many thought that Berlin was the new Yerushalayim (see *Artscroll Kinnos* p. 271). Subsequently, R. Avigdor Miller (*A Divine Madness*) links the Holocaust to 150 years of secularization which engulfed the majority of the Jews in Europe by 1939.
- 7 See *With Fury Poured Out* by R. Bernard Maza.
- 8 See *Tradition* 39:2 Summer 2005 p. 66, 67.



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THE KINNOT OF THE CRUSADES

On Tisha B'Av, we recite several Kinnot (liturgical readings) to commemorate the Crusades. In an effort to understand why the Crusades remain so central to our cultural consciousness, this article will explore questions relating to their recitation.

First, is there a change when we move from Kinnot related to events surrounding *Churban HaBayit* to the Kinnot related to the Crusades and other events in Jewish history? Do we discuss these historical events simply because Tisha B'Av is the most

appropriate day to commemorate all tragedies, or is there a deeper thematic link between all these tragedies and Tisha B'Av?

Second, to what extent do the Kinnot color our understanding of the historical events that took place? In our world, Jewish history is seldom studied. Jewish history remains in the domain of specialists, historians and scholars; it largely does not penetrate the domain of the average shul-going, yeshiva-educated Jew. This can clearly be seen by perusing the shelves of most *batei midrash*. Seforim

on Shas, poskim, halacha, aggada, and mussar abound. Even seforim on Jewish philosophy (often called *machshava*) can standardly be found in *batei midrash*. Seforim on Jewish history, however, are rarely found. Consequently, for most shul-going Jews, the only time the history of the Crusades is discussed is on Tisha B'Av. On Tisha B'Av we don't read pure history; instead we read liturgical poems about the events. Dates, precise figures, names (even of major personalities), all the hallmarks of history are largely absent. Instead, the

language and themes of Kinnot recited over the Crusades is virtually identical to the language of all Kinnot. If we miss the brief introductory sentence in the Kinnot or read quickly without paying careful attention to the text, we may miss that the Crusades are being discussed at all.

Is this proper? Should rabbis limit our exposure to the Crusades to the words found in the Kinnot, or should they delve into their history? Is it important for shul-goers to hear the name of Pope Urban II on Tisha B'Av? In our tradition, based on the way Rav Soloveitchik expounded upon the Kinnot, history is clearly not an afterthought. It is noteworthy, however, that the Rov did not cite historians by name. He spoke in generalities and discussed trends rather than focusing on specific details.

Third, why are events from a thousand years ago, which appear relatively small, still a focus? A total of ten people, all *talmidei chachamim*, were killed in the first attack of the Crusades on Speyer. This number pales in significance to the massive numbers killed in more recent times. But we continue to mourn Speyer. Why?

Perhaps the lesson is that we should not become inured to the single tragedy, the individual suffering, even in the face of what is numerically so massive. Perhaps the lesson is also that the destruction of these three communities in the Rhineland represents much more than the number of those killed.

If this is the case, we need to question what precisely was so bad about the Crusades. From the perspective of Torah scholarship in Ashkenaz (writ large), little changed; Rashi wrote

both before the Crusades and after; the Baalei HaTosafot and subsequent Rishonim who comprise our staple of learning in Yeshivot wrote after 1096. Why, then, are the Crusades mourned nearly 1,000 years after they occurred? Numerically relative to recent tragedies few people were killed; in terms of Torah scholarship the impact does not seem to be that significant. Why all the focus?

This question is compounded when we note that we recite far more Kinnot for the Crusades compared to other tragedies in Jewish history. Most communities recite but a single kinna to commemorate the Holocaust. Yet four Kinnot are recited to remember the Crusades. Why so many? Why are more Kinnot recited for the Crusades than any other tragedy save Churban HaMikdash?¹

Rav Soloveitchik explained these Kinnot by focusing on the destruction of Torah brought by the Crusades.² Yes, the Baalei Tosafot we study were written after the Crusades, however there still was very significant loss to Torah. The majority of the extant Baalei HaTosafot we have come from France. An entire German school was destroyed.³

The German school of Baalei HaTosafot had slightly different interests and proclivities than the French school. Whereas the French were most interested in comparing each piece of Gemara to its parallels throughout Shas, asking questions on discrepancies from these sources and resolving these questions by drawing distinctions, the Germans took a different route. Their method often began not from the Talmudic text but from a real-life story. In this context, they drew upon the Gemara and sought to properly understand it.⁴

Moreover, German Rishonim had an affinity toward piyyutim.⁵ This affinity is largely absent from the French school of Baalei HaTosafot, which remain our staple of study today.⁶

In effect, the German school was more emotive and focused on realia,⁷ as opposed to the French school. Building upon Rav Soloveitchik's analysis, it seems that when we mourn the Crusades we mourn this loss to Torah. Our mourning is both a qualitative and a quantitative loss of Torah. Not only did the Crusades cause a loss to Torah in that many books were not written,⁸ but perhaps more important was the qualitative loss. The destroyed German schools represented a slice of life that we no longer have access to. All the stories cited in Rishonim to convey deep meaning, all the analysis of piyyutim that could convey deep-seated emotion, that is all lost. We may have all the facts, all the raw material. However, the emotion, the slice of life that the German school represented is sorely lacking. In our world, where information is so easily accessed, but wisdom and meaning remain so elusive, this loss looms even larger.

However, I would like to suggest another reason why the Crusades continues to loom so large in our communal and collective memory. Dr. Haym Soloveitchik once noted that the Crusades represented the last time Jews of Ashkenaz (writ large) were surprised by their persecution. Following the Crusades, Jewish history in Ashkenaz (as described by a famous Jewish historian) was written in blood rather than in ink. We went from persecution to persecution, from blood libel to allegations of well-poisoning and host desecration, from pogrom to pogrom. Our lives

were constantly at ill-ease. We never felt secure. Promises made by kings and governors almost always rang completely hollow.

The Crusades may represent the first time since Churban HaBayit when Jews were surprised by an attack. It was this feeling of surprise, this sudden loss of security, that may be why the Crusades continue to occupy such a major place in our consciousness.

Perhaps this is an overarching theme of Kinnot. We were surprised by Churban HaBayit. Yirmiyahu HaNavi describes how the people felt the abode of Hashem could not possibly be destroyed:

אֵל תִּבְטְחוּ לְכֶם אֶל דְּבַרֵי הַשִּׁקָּר לְאֹמֵר הַיְכָל
ה' הַיְכָל ה' הַיְכָל ה' הַמִּזְבֵּחַ.

Don't put your trust in illusions and say, "The Temple of the Lord, the Temple of the Lord, the Temple of the Lord are these [buildings]."

Yirmiyahu 7:4

The false prophets claimed that the Beit HaMikdash was impervious; it could never be destroyed. Many believed them. Churban HaBayit was sudden and unexpected. In a similar light, Rav Eliezer HaKalir begins all of Kinnot by noting *Shavat suru meni* — it all ceased. The tranquility and peace suddenly and unexpectedly ended. Security was no longer. There was no warning. The end came suddenly.⁹

We can maintain that not all tragedies are included in Kinnot. We don't recite Kinnot for the Khelminicki

massacres of 1648–1649.¹⁰ We only recite Kinnot for those tragedies that befell us suddenly. The Crusades were such a tragedy.

An added dimension is that Churban HaBayit itself is commemorated on the 9th of Av rather than the 10th when the Beit Hamikdash was actually destroyed. The Gemara, *Ta'anit* 29a, comments that we observe the 9th of Av because it represents *atchalta d'puranuta*, the beginning of the tragedy. The beginning of tragedy is worse than the culmination. The Crusades may represent the same idea. The tragic events that took place in a way mirror the Churban HaBayit.¹¹

Endnotes

1 See *Kinnot Mesoret HaRav* page 538.

2 See *Kinnot Mesoret HaRav* page 431.

3 Most often French and German Baalei Hatosafot are grouped together into a single unit. See for example Artscroll's popular work, *The Rishonim*. Rav Soloveitchik, however, with his keen historical sense noted that these two groups of Rishonim were in fact quite different.

4 Good examples of the German school of Baalei HaTosafot can be seen when reading the Mordechai and the *Or Zarua*.

5 The classical work on piyyutim is Rav Avraham ben Azriel's *Arugat HaBosem*. It is worth reading but a few pages of his explanations on one of the Kinnot we recite on Tisha B'Av to gain a sense of his breadth of knowledge of midrashim that he accessed and his ability to bring this to the fore when analyzing a kinna. That *Arugat haBosem* (d.

circa 1235) does not explain the Crusades Kinnot suggests that perhaps these were not widely recited in his time.

6 Dr. Haym Soloveitchik summarizes the differences between the French and German Baalei HaTosafot in many places. See for example *HaYayin Beyemei HaBeinayim* pages 122–127.

7 A fine example of a German work that focuses heavily on realia and has no parallel among the French Baalei HaTosafot is Rav Yehuda ben Klonimous of Speyer's *Yechusei Tannaim VaAmoraim*.

8 This point is made by Rav Soloveitchik, *Kinnot Mesoret HaRav*, page 435, in explaining the line מי יפליא נדירות ומי יערך נדרים in kinna #22.

9 See *Kinnot Mesoret HaRav* page 198.

10 These kinnot, including one authored by the Shach, were written to be recited on the fast of 20 Sivan.

11 One of the Kinnot that commemorates the Crusades, *Mi Yitein Roshi Mayim*, states that Tisha B'Av is the national day of mourning and additional days of mourning should not be added to commemorate subsequent tragedies (*ein l'hosif moed shever v'tav'erah*). Much has been written on the permissibility or advisability of establishing a separate fast day to commemorate the Holocaust. In this context, many cite the comment of Rashi on Divrei hayamim (2:35:25) that on Tisha B'Av, one should recite Kinnot even for contemporary tragedies. This source was one of the major reasons why many gedolim opposed the establishment of a separate day of mourning. Many ask, if that is the case, why is it that the 20th Sivan was established to commemorate an attack on the Jews during the days of Rabbenu Tam and later expanded to include those who died in the Khelminicki massacres? It is worth noting that Rav Aryeh Pomaranchik in his *Emek Bracha* page 133 notes that poskim do not cite this Rashi as halacha. Rav Pomaranchik was a student of Chazon Ish. See however *Iggrot Chazon Ish* #97.



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Spiritual Challenges in Times of Persecution



THE SPANISH INQUISITION

The Mishna in *Taanis* (26b) teaches that both the first Beis Hamikdash and the second were destroyed on the 9th of Av. The Gemara (29a) proceeds to prove that the first Beis Hamikdash was destroyed on Tisha B'av and attempts to show the same for the second. However, the Gemara shockingly offers no empirical evidence or verses of prophecy to prove that the second Beis Hamikdash was destroyed on Tisha B'av. The Gemara concludes it must have been destroyed on the 9th of Av, because that is the only day that it could have occurred — *megalgin zechus l'yom zakai v'chova l'yom chayav* — merits occur on days of merit and calamities occur on days of

calamity. The very nature of that date on the Jewish calendar is fraught with calamity, so it must be that the second Beis Hamikdash was also razed on the 9th of Av.

It is from this perspective that we say in the Kinna titled *Mi Yiten Roshi Mayim*, that “*ein l'hosif mo'ed shever v'saveirah*,” which is understood to mean that once this date has been set aside as one of tragedy — as one on which we sit and mourn — we mourn other tragedies in Jewish history as well, and we don't add separate days of mourning. Thus, in our Kinnos we find piyutim relating to events that took place after the time of the second Beis Hamikdash as well as events

that do not necessarily correlate directly with the date of Tisha B'av. We describe the destruction of the Crusades, the pogroms and the Holocaust among others.

Notably, there is an event that does coincide more directly with Tisha B'av and yet is absent from Ashkenazi Kinnos, although many Sefardic communities do include it. The Spanish Inquisition of Ferdinand and Isabella was declared on December 27, 1480 and subsequently the Alhambra Decree was issued on March 31, 1492, ordering the expulsion of practicing Jews from the Kingdoms of Castile and Aragon and its territories and possessions by July 31, 1492.

Interestingly, that date corresponds to the 7th of Av, but it is reported that it was delayed a few days until the 9th of Av as the Abarbanel in his commentary to Yirmiyahu 2:24 writes:

והנה כשגזר מלך ספרד גירוש על כל היהודים אשר בכל מדינות מלכותו שיצאו כמשלוש חדשים נשלם והיה יום היציאה ט' באב והוא לא ידע מזה הזמן, דיבר כאילו מן השמים הדריכוהו להגבלת הזמן הזה לקיים דבר הנביא שאמר בחדשה ימצאוהו.

When the king of Spain decreed expulsion of all the Jews in his kingdom, he decreed they must leave at the conclusion of three months, and the day of final expulsion was the 9th of Av. The king certainly did not know of the significance of this date, but he spoke as if from heaven they led him to this period of time to fulfill the words of the prophet that those who pursue the Jews won't tire and will find you in that month.

A review of some of the literature of the late 15th century and early 16th century provides a glimpse into the nature of this particular horror. The death toll of the time period is not easy to discern, and historians disagree as to its scope. Jews were allowed to leave, and were only punished if they chose to stay and were perceived to be a negative religious impact on the Christian community of the day.

Many Jews chose to remain and live a life of hidden Judaism. In the public eye they had converted, but in the dark recesses of their homes they chose to remain Jewish. In Hebrew literature they are referenced as *anusim* (the coerced ones), while they are often more broadly characterized as Marranos or Conversos. It was, in fact, the Conversos who were the main target of the Inquisition, whose members wished to rid these legal Christians of any heresy relating to their practice of Judaism.

There are several salient points that emerge from the literature of the time, which give us insight into the unique challenge of this period and its specific tragedy. There was a struggle among the rabbanim as to how to relate to the Conversos — should they be treated as Jews based on the principle *Yisrael af al pi shechata Yisrael hu* — a Jew, even though he sinned is still a Jew? Or is public conversion to another religion worse, in particular when it comes to subsequent generations of *anusim*?

Part of this struggle is a question of balance. On the one hand, it was deemed important to give *chizzuk*, to strengthen those who withstood the test of their faith and left Spain. On the other hand, there were those who wished to remind the Conversos that they could return fully to the Jewish faith.

The Abarbanel wrote of the challenges that those who fled faced on a theological level, and offered words of encouragement. In the opening to his Pesach Hagaddah, he writes from the perspective of those living at the time in very powerful language:

מה הרווחנו אנשי הגלות כמוהו היום במה שיצאו אבותינו ממצרים... כי אפשר שהיינו יושבים שם בשלוה יותר משיבתנו בגלות אדום וישמעאל (שבספרד) וכמו שאמרו אבותינו הלא טוב לנו עבוד את מצרים ממותנו במדבר העמים בתוך השמדות והגירושין, אשר לחרב לחרב ואשר לרעב לרעב ואשר לשבי לשבי.

What have we, here in the exile, gained today since our ancestors left Egypt?... Perhaps there we would be able to dwell in peace and quiet more than here in the exile?! Similar to what our ancestors complained, we were better off in Egypt than dying in the desert with all our persecution and expulsion. Here, those summoned to the sword die by the sword, those in famine are lost to famine and those taken captive are lost in captivity.

The Abarbanel seems to be speaking to the low spirit of the Jews who withstood the religious test, but had to flee their homeland and were in no way safe. And he tries to comfort them to be confident that even after tragedy, Hashem has His plan and a redemption will still come.

“לא אמות כי אחיה ואספר מעשי י-ה” ולפי שראה המשורר ברוח קדשו שיפול ספק גדול בלבבות האנשים אם ישראל יתמו בגלות מתוך צרותיהם, לכן הוצרך לומר כמבטיח ומדבר בשם האומה - לא אמות כי אחיה ואספר מעשה י-ה.

“I will not die, rather I will live and I will tell of the deeds of Hashem.” The great composer (Dovid Hamelech) saw with his divine spirit that a strong sense of doubt would overcome the people and they may think that the fate of the Jewish people will end in the exile, therefore he proclaims and promises — on behalf of the nation of Israel, we won't die, we will live and tell of the deeds of Hashem.

However, the rabbanim were not only concerned about the mindset of those who had overcome the test of the Inquisition and expulsion, but of those who had publicly converted as well, who were still privately and in secret living as Jews.

Rav Yitzchak Arama in his *Akeidas Yitzchak* to Parshas Ki Seitzei writes:

שח לי חכם אחד כי אחד מחכמי הגוים בראותו היהודים שואלין ודורשין גט מאיש יהודי מומר והוא מסרב לגרש האשה היהודית, ששאל לו, למה יבקשוהו ממנו, כי אחר שיצא מדתו ראוי להם להחשיבו כאילו אינו חי והרי אשתו ראויה להחשב כאלמנה לכל דבר. ואמר שהיתה תשובתו אליו, כי לא באה עליו המרה עצמית אלא מקרית כלומר, שינוי השם בלבד... שאין בידו להמיר עצמותו באשר הוא יהודי. אמרתי לו, התשובה הזאת היא אמיתית לפי דתנו והוא מאמרם ז"ל, ישראל אע"פ שחטא ישראל הוא.

A sage reported to me that a wise man of the nations of the world, upon seeing that Jews were asking a man who had converted away from Judaism to write and give a get to his wife, and he was refusing to cooperate, the wise man asked them, "why are you concerned, now that he has left the Jewish faith consider him as dead, thereby she be considered a widow and free to marry another man." And they responded, "his leaving Judaism was not a fundamental change in him, it is just a change of his identification ... there is no way to fundamentally change from being a Jew." I responded, "what you told him was in fact true, as Chazal teach us, that a Jew even if he sins, is still a Jew."

The Abarbanel in his commentary to Sefer Yechezkel in Chapter 20 goes even further:

ישראל אע"פ שחטא - ישראל הוא ואע"פ שעבדו ע"ז על כל פנים ישוב אל העדר אשר ממנו לוקח הוא וזרעו... שבאחרית הימים יעיר ה' לבות המשומידים האנוסים הם או זרעם, לשוב אל ה' ולעשות קצת המצוות... ויתעוררו לבות האנוסים הם ובניהם נשיהם וטפם לנוס... מקרב הנוצרים למרחקי ארץ למלט נפשם.

A Jew, even though he sinned is still a Jew, even if he has worshipped idols he will still return to the flock from which he and his children were taken. In the days of redemption Hashem will awaken the hearts of those who were coercively converted together with their children, to return to Hashem and to a performance of some mitzvos. And their hearts will be awakened, together with their wives and children to run away from Christianity to distant lands to save their souls.

Abarbanel seems to be offering encouragement to those who had succumbed to conversion to realize they are not lost, they are part of the nation. The prophecies for the future redemption are said about them as

well and the door is not closed to a return to Torah and mitzvos.

There is a comment from Rav Avraham Sava in his commentary *Tzror Hamor* to Parshas Vaeschanan, in which he even goes so far as to advise how to keep religion alive in the children, if you can't teach them Torah or openly practice with them.

ואמר והיו הדברים האלה אשר אנכי מצוך היום על לבבך... והענין הזה הוא כמו שכתבתי שהתורה הגיעה לסוף הצרות והגזרות שעתידין לגזור על ישראל. להעבירים על דת ושלא יעסקו בתורה. כמו שקרה בגירוש פורטוגאל "ל שגורו שלא ידרשו בריבים ושלא ילמדו לתינוקות. ולקחו כל הספרים והבתי כנסיות באופן שלא יתפללו ולא יעסקו בתורה. עד שכמעט נשתכחה תורה מישראל. כי איך ילמדו לבניהם בלי ספר ובלי מלמד. ולא נשאר להם אלא שילמדום שמע ישראל וידעו איך ה' אחד. ושראו לאהבו ולמסור נפשו על קדושתו. ולכן נתן השם לישראל לאותם זמנים פרשה קצרה של שמע ישראל שהיא כלל כל התורה. ואם לא יוכלו לידע כל הפרשה. למעט ידעו פסוק שמע ישראל שהוא עיקר הייחוד. וילמדו אותו פסוק לבניהם בענין שידעו שהוא השם אחד ולו היכולת:

The verse says, "These words I am commanding you today should be on your heart." The idea is like I have explained, the Torah anticipated the times of tragedy and persecution that will come upon the Jewish people in the future, to force conversion and not allow them to learn Torah as happened in the expulsion from Portugal where they enacted a decree that Torah could not be taught in public, nor taught to children. They took the holy books and the shuls and didn't allow davening or Torah learning, until Torah was all but forgotten from the Jews. For how can Torah be transmitted to their children without a book or a teacher? They were left with only one option, to teach them "Shema Yisrael" so they should know there is only one Hashem and it is Him

we must love and be prepared to sanctify His name in death. So for those periods of time, when Torah can't be taught, Hashem gave us this chapter of "Shema Yisrael" as it in a broad sense includes the whole Torah. And if even that is too much, just the single verse of "Shema Yisrael" should be taught to know that He is the only God and is all-powerful.

Rav Avraham Sava, who himself was expelled from Spain and later from Portugal as well, seems to be speaking to all the Jews of his generation. Both those who are in the midst of the persecution and have fled and those who were Conversos and publicly converted must take active steps to preserve a connection to Hashem. It was for these times that Hashem put Shema Yisrael in the Torah, to teach it to our children so they can hold on to that connection to Hashem, His Torah and His people.

Unfortunately, the situation of the *anusim* led to new halachic literature delving into the status of the *anusim* in different areas of halacha. Some questions related even to the first generation *anusim*, while others were directed at subsequent generations of Conversos, for whom the connection to Judaism became more tenuous.

The Rivash in his responsa, siman 4 addresses questions of kashrus and the Conversos.

עוד שאלת בכתב האחרון אם יוכל אדם מאנוסי הזמן לעבודת כוכבים לדרוך ענבים בגת של ישראל ויהיה היין כשר כאלו דרכו ישראל אם אין. ג"כ יש מהם רבים עושין יין בביתם או באוצרות מיוחדים להם ואומרים שעשאוהו בהכשר כראוי הנוכל לסמוך עליהם לשותותו ואם ישאוהו מעבר לים להעיד עליו שהוא בשר וגם מהם שיומין ישראל לאכול עמו וישים לפניו בשר ויין היבטח בו שהוא כשר בדבריו ויעמידהו על חזקתו שלא יניח ההיתר ויאכילהו אסור בידיים ואעפ"י שחטא ישראל הוא ולא יחוש לכליו אולי בשל בהם

דבר אסור ולענין שחיטתן ומגען אם נחשבם
 כישראלים גמורים אם אין ע"כ:
 You asked in your last letter if one of
 the Conversos of today who converted
 to Christianity is allowed to crush the
 grapes in a Jew's winepress and whether
 the wine remains kosher as if a Jew did it.
 Or many of them make their own wine at
 home or in special store houses and claim
 it was done in a kosher manner; can we
 rely on them to drink the wine? Or can
 we assume the claim that meat is kosher
 or when eating with them that the food is
 in fact kosher? Can we rely on a chazaka
 that they wouldn't choose forbidden food
 over kosher? Even though a Jew who sins
 is still a Jew, do we have to be concerned
 that non-kosher food was made in
 their pots? When it comes to meat they
 slaughtered or wine they touched do we
 treat them like Jews or not?

While these may not seem like
 crucial questions, it reflects a basic
 question of their Jewish status and
 by extension, can we eat with them?
 Can we socialize with them? Are they
 a part of our nation? How do we treat
 them? The deeper messages of this
 question are in fact painful to think
 about. They relate to the very fabric
 of Jewish life and how our fellow Jews
 are to be treated.

The questions relating to Jewish
 identity only became more
 exacerbated in later generations.
 Rabbi Shimon and Tzemach Doron
 (grandsons of the Rasbash who fled
 Algeria in the 1500s) were asked in
 their responsa, *Yachin U'boaz* 2:3,
 about the status of kohanim:

יש לעיין בבעלי תשובה אלו שאנוסי הזמן
 שבאין קצת מהם וטוענים שהם מאותם
 המוחזקין בכהונה ורוצים לקרות בתורה
 ראשון, האם יש לנו להעלותם לקרות בתורה
 ראשון או לא.

We need to examine the status of those
 who have repented from the descendants

of the anusim and are claiming that
 they are positive they came from priestly
 families and are entitled to the first aliya
 when reading the Torah; should we trust
 them or not?

Again, not necessarily the most
 pressing question, but a question that
 points to issues relating to how to treat
 those who descended from people
 who kept Jewish practice in secret, but
 outwardly converted to Christianity.

Perhaps what best summarizes the
 perspective on this tragic period
 emerges from one of the kinnos of
 the time. It is a kinna of unknown
 authorship first brought to light by
 Professor Aron Freimann in 1933.²

הוסר מצנפת ועטרת
 על כל הגולה כותרת
 נפלה עטרת תפארת
 בשו כגנב במחתרת

*The turban and crown was removed
 The header [was removed] from the
 Diaspora
 The glorious crown has fallen
 Ashamed like a thief [caught] in a tunnel*

איך מעומקה של הלכה
 עברו בעמק הבכה
 מעוף צוקה וחשכה
 נסים היום מן המערכה

*How is that from the depth of Jewish law
 They passed to the valley of tears?
 From the weariness of gloom and
 darkness
 They run today from the battlefield*

איה סופר איה שוקל מקרא
 איה דקדוק מאיר אורה
 איה לפול בגמרא
 כי מספרד תצא תורה

*Where is the scribe? Where is the teacher
 of Tanach?
 Where is the one who analyzes [Torah]
 and shines its light?
 Where is the discourse in the Talmud?
 For Torah used to come from Spain*

The paytan is very clearly focusing on
 the tremendous loss of Torah. The
 Torah once emerged so greatly from
 Spain, and now its crown of glory has
 fallen. There are no teachers of Torah,
 there is no one left to delve into the
 depths of the Torah, Torah no longer
 is emerging from Spain.

Perhaps that is the unique element we
 recall in remembering the anniversary
 of the expulsion from Spain on Tisha
 B'Av. We remember the religious
 churban that took place. Jews could
 not learn Torah, many succumbed
 to the Inquisition and their status,
 even while trying to remain crypto-
 Jews, was tenuous and halachically
 concerning. Others needed *chizzuk*
 that redemption can still come, but
 that Torah no longer emerged from
 Spain. Spain as a leading makom
 Torah was lost³ and the depth of the
 loss of that Torah is one that can't
 be quantified. This is part of our
 reflection on the day of Tisha B'Av.

Endnotes

1 The goal of this article is to focus on
 the tragedy of the expulsion from Spain
 from the perspective of Rabbinic literature.
 Occasionally historical data was used and
 although some of the points are debated by
 the historians, I relied for the most part on
 the work *Geirush Sefarad: Korot Umekorot*
 compiled by Rav Yitzchak Goldberg who
 beautifully combines historical data and
 Rabbinic sources.

2 It is published in a volume in honor of R'
 Tzvi Peretz Chayos, *Ma'amarim L'Zichron R.
 Tzvi Peretz Chayos* published in 1933, page
 242.

3 It's noteworthy that many of those who
 fled Spain fled to the Land of Israel and
 formed a basis of the Torah community that
 flourished in Tzfat and Yerushalayim.



CANTONISTS: THE LOST BOYS

We can state the nature of the dilemma in three words: they were lost. A whole generation of Jewish boys, nearly 50,000 of them, were abused, abandoned, and stolen from their people and by their people. When reflecting on the 29-year period of the Cantonists, it's no wonder that the venerated sages Hillel and Rabbi Akiva considered *ve'ahavta lerei'acha kamocha* (love your fellow Jew as you love yourself) the "greatest principle in the Torah."¹ From 1827-1856, this seemingly straightforward mitzvah was tested to the core in the Pale of the Settlement, Imperial Russia's Western region, where Jewish life was growing and thriving, yet separate from modern Russia. With the goal of Russifying them, Czar Nicholas I required a set quota of Jewish boys ages 12 and up to be conscripted

into military academies, where they would be trained for 25 years of Russian military service. The *Kahal*, self-appointed leaders of the Jewish communities, were charged with the responsibility of filling these quotas — meaning, it was up to them to take these boys from their homes and assign them a fate of torture, isolation, and oftentimes conversion. The implementers of the quota — also Jews — *the khappers*, took the young boys by whatever means — trickery, bribery, kidnapping — and turned them in for assignment. In this era, the main questions became: to what extent do we go to save a fellow Jew? If it's my son or your son, is it up to us to choose? When outside powers pit Jews against one another, how do we respond?

Firsthand accounts are few and far

between from this time period. Eastern European rabbis and laymen alike could never be sure whether their lamentations or sermons would be read or heard by Imperial soldiers or even a desperate fellow Jew, who could use their counteractive statements as immunity for their son. From what we do have though, it's clear that this was considered a matter of *pikuach nefesh* (mortal threat) and *pidyon shivuyim* (ransoming Jews in captivity), according to the studies of Yohanan Petrovsky-Shtern, Crown Family Professor of Jewish Studies, a professor of history and renowned expert in the Cantonist period. Russian officials found a few pages of Hebrew texts in the home of a Rabbi Solman of Starye Zhagary, where he compared sending Jewish boys to the Russian army to the mothers who ate their children during the

First Temple siege.² Other rabbis took a more practical approach, such as Rabbi David of Novardek (1769-1837) and Rabbi Yisrael Meir Kagan, the Chafetz Chaim (1839-1933).

In a sermon given in Tevet 5594 (December 1833), Rabbi David of Novardek focused on the importance of those conscripted to do their best to maintain their faith:³

אחיי בני ישראל כתיב וזכור את בוראך בימי
בחרותך אף שבאמת אונס רחמנא פטריה
וממילא ע"פ אשר אתם אנוסים פטורין
אתם, אולם יש זמן וזמנים אשר מספיקין
לקבל עליכם עול מלכות שמים ערב ובקר ...
הנה יעקב אמר עם לבן גרתי ותרי"ג מצות
שמרתי אצל יוסף לא מצינו שיתפאר א"ע
בדבר זה שישמור כל התרי"ג מצות בהיותו
במצרים, אבל הענין הוא יעקב לא היה עליו
עול עבדות היה יכול לשמור כל מצות הבורא
משא"כ לעבד נמכר יוסף לא היה יכול לקיים
כל המצות אחרי אשר היה ברשות אחרים,
אעפ"כ קיים כל האפשרי ועי"ז זכה להיות
נושא חן בעיני שר בית הסוהר.

My brothers, the children of Israel, the verse (Kohelet 12:1) states, "Remember your creator in the days of your youth." Even though, in truth, one who is under duress is exempted by the Torah and thus, since you are under duress, you are exempt [from any culpability], nevertheless, there are moments that allow you to accept the yoke of heaven every evening and morning ... While Yaakov said, "I lived with Lavan and observed the 613 mitzvot," regarding Yosef, we don't see him praising himself about the fact that he observed all 613 mitzvot in Egypt. The reason is that Yaakov, who didn't have the yoke of slavery upon him, was able to keep all of the mitzvot. However, Yosef was sold as a slave and he couldn't fulfill all of the mitzvot while in the possession of a master. Nevertheless, he did the best that he could and because of this, he merited finding favor in the eyes of the prison warden.

In a sermon for Rosh Hashanah 5588 (1827) R. David laments the terrible situation, claiming that being conscripted this way is a punishment worse than death:

שבעוה"ר פקודה זאת לקיחות אנשי חיל
אשר ראוי לומר בזה אשר נבחר מות מחיים
שידוע אפילו אצל אומות יש כמה מהם אשר
מאבדים עצמם לדעת מבלי שיקחו אותם
לאנשי חיל אשר הד"ת אחת להם, מכש"כ
וק"ו אצלינו שמעברים על הדת והתורה
הקדושה בודאי נבחר לנו מות מחיים, אמנם
להאיש הנלקח אין רבותא כ"כ, אלא אפילו
לכל שארית נשארים מהמשפחה אנחתם
ויגונם רבה מאוד אשר נבחר להם המות.

This decree of conscripting soldiers is worthy of saying that one might prefer death over life. It is known that even among the other nations, there are those who kill themselves rather than being taken as soldiers. These are people who are of the same religion. How much more so regarding our own, where they force [soldiers] to violate our religion and the holy Torah, it is certain that they would prefer death over life. For the soldier himself, this idea is somewhat obvious. However, this applies even to his family, whose sorrow and anguish is great. They might also prefer death over life.

The Chafetz Chaim compiled a volume called *Machaneh Yisrael* addressing the halachic and philosophical issues that Jewish soldiers would face in the army and

notably practical and empathetic solutions. While this volume was written in 1881, after the reversal of Cantonist decree, Jewish adults were still subject to conscription and the spiritual challenges, albeit less extreme, were similar. In the opening chapter, he addresses the spiritual challenge that these soldiers face and offers them words of encouragement:

ע"כ צריך שידע איש הצבא שלא נופל ערכו
עי"ז מבראשונה בשום דבר ... ועל אחת כמה
וכמה בזה שלא מכר את עצמו ברצונו רק
שנפל גורלו שיהיה הוא לעבודת הצבא בודאי
אין לו ח"ו שום פחיתות בעבור זה.

A soldier in the army should know that he is no less valuable [because of his conscription] than what he was before [his conscription] in any manner ... Certainly because he didn't willingly "sell himself," rather he was chosen to join the army, he is certainly not, God forbid, less valuable because of this.

Machaneh Yisrael ch. 1

Jewish leaders, both communal and spiritual, used every means they could to ensure that their boys would at the very least be allowed to hold onto parts of their heritage while in the army, such as celebrating Jewish holidays, eating kosher food, and having access to rabbinical figures. Despite their efforts, Jewish boys who clung to their faith, even in the mere utterance of their inner



A soldier in the army should know that he is no less valuable [because of his conscription] than what he was before [his conscription] in any manner ...

- R. Yisrael Meir Kagan

allegiance, were punished and tortured.

R. Yisrael Salanter (1810-1883) expended great efforts fighting against these quotas, even meeting with government officials who were sympathetic to his cause. He also decried community leaders who passively allowed Jews to select other Jews, particularly the ones from weaker families, for conscription. One particular incident involved a child of a widow who was taken by the Jewish community and chosen for conscription. When R. Yisrael visited the town for Shabbat, the boy's mother pled with him to do something. R. Dov Katz describes R. Yisrael's response:

אחרי תפילת שחרית, באו כל נכבדי המקום לאכסנייתו של רבי ישראל למסיבת קידוש. אחרי שקידשו על היין, קם פתאום רבי ישראל ממקומו בקצף נורא והתחיל לנוזף במסובים על השערוריה במעשה החטיפה ולכנותם בשמות גנאי: רוצחים, גונבי נפשות וכו'. בהיותו מכיר את ראשי הקהל, פנה אל כל אחד מהם באופן אישי. לאחד אמר "הרי צדיק אתה וקושר מטפחתך על הצואר בשבת כדי לא להוציא אף במקום עירוב, ואילו לעבור על הפסוק 'גונב איש ומכרו מות יומת' לא איכפת לך? לשני אמר: "הרי מחזר אתה אחרי הידורי מצוה ומדקדק בקלה כבחמורה ואילו למסור נפש מישראל לשמד מותר?" לשלישי אמר ... וכן לרביעי וכן לחמישי ... ר' ישראל קפץ בחמתו כאילו הכישו נחש תוך כדי זעקה מרה שאסור להימצא בחברת פריצים, עזב בבהלה את הבית ובאמצע יום השבת יצא את העיר.

After the morning prayers, all of the distinguished members of the community came to the lodging place of R. Yisrael for a kiddush reception. After they made kiddush over wine, R. Yisrael suddenly rose from his chair with great anger and started rebuking those gathered over the controversy involving the taking of this child. He started calling them derogatory

names: murderers, kidnappers, etc. Being that he knew the leaders of the community, he turned to each of them personally. To one, he said, "You are so righteous that you tie your scarf around your neck on Shabbat so that you don't have to carry even in a place where there is an eruv, but to violate the verse (Shemot 21:16) 'one who steals a person and sells him [...] shall be put to death' does not concern you?" To a second, he said, "You seek to perform mitzvot in the most preferred way and you are scrupulous about all mitzvot, but giving over a Jewish person for conversion to another religion is permissible?" To the third, he said ... and the same with the fourth and the fifth ... R. Yisrael jumped in anger as if he were bitten by a snake and cried out that it is prohibited to be present with a group of sinners, he quickly left the house, and on Shabbat itself, he left the city.

R. Yisrael's rebuke made an impact. The matter was quickly resolved and the boy was returned to his family.⁴

In Their Own Words

Why though, would any of these boys cling to their faith? Their leaders let them go. Their communities let them go. Their parents, whether willingly or not, let them go. When the only person they had to count on in the world was themselves, why did some of them decide, at such a young age, that Judaism was worth constant sacrifice, suffering and rejection? Once the Cantonist era ended, memoirs, plays, and poetry about the boys' experiences were published in the years that followed. There are many stirring accounts that relay tragic realities: one son being chosen to hide over another, children being beaten and starved until they agreed to be baptized, young men belonging nowhere, unaccepted

by neither their old community nor their new one. What gave this lost generation any reason to hold onto an identity that fated them for a life without family, community, or a sense of belonging? An excerpt from *Der Yiddishe Shtral*, no. 1127, found in Rabbi Yitzchak Zilber's biography, *To Remain a Jew*, may give us a clue:

I was nine when I was taken away from my mother and drafted to be a soldier. My mother was a widow; I was her only child ... I can only vaguely remember the village we lived in, Pyatocka. According to the law, as an only son, I should have been exempt. But the law, as it seems, wasn't written for poor people. Some rich relative, from either my father's or mother's side, bribed the authorities and presented me as one of his sons, so I was drafted instead.

Those times are still like a nightmare to me that I don't want to remember ... They locked me and ten other unfortunate boys in a room for days. The soldiers were smoking and swearing. All the other boys had visitors — father, mother, or some relative ... But nobody came to visit me ... Every day I grew angrier and angrier ... I was angry at them all...

But between all those wretched memories, there was one happy memory that warmed my heart. When we entered the spacious barracks, we were surprised to meet five or six Jewish men. One stood out among them ... In his eyes there was so much empathy, so much love, such wonderful kindness! I was so young, tired, frozen and hungry, longing for love and warmth...

"Shalom aleichem yiddelach" he said. His voice was sweet and calming ... This man was Rav Naftali of Lyutzin...

Since I had been taken away from my mother, I had not cried, not even once ...

but when I saw [Rav Naftali] something began to wake up inside of me and I started to cry...

With tears in my eyes I said, "My mother didn't come to say goodbye to me." I cried and cried. I felt like my heart would burst. His warm hands were stroking me. We sat on a log outside ... he said over and over, "Cry, cry lonely child, orphan..."

We had to come to the base to check in every morning and evening. Rav Naftali used to come with us for about an hour, sometimes even more ... He told us about Rabbi Akiva, Rabbi Chanina ben Tradyon, about Daniel, Chananya, Mishael, and Azarya, and about the Inquisition and the Crusades. But most of all, he liked to repeat the story of Yosef Hatzaddik...

Yosef was sold by his own brothers. Using his talents, wits, and honesty, he managed to reach the high position of viceroy in Egypt. During that long period he was far from his loved ones — his family, his father, his nation ... He had been hurt; his own brothers ... threw him out! Nevertheless ... he saw the face of his father Yaakov before him and knew that Yaakov was mourning and longing for him...

After many years, I understood why this

rabbi told us about Yosef so many times ... Yosef was young, in his teens when his brothers — fellow Jews — sold him ... He could have gotten angry with all the Jews and abandoned his religion. But Yosef did not...

And then that dreadful day came [to be taken to the Cantonist academies] ... When we lifted our eyes, there was Rav Naftali ... He began to cry: "You are Jewish children, don't forget that you are Jews. Remember Daniel, Chananya, Michael, Azarya, Rabbi Akiva, and Yosef!"

There was another Yosef that spoke of what it felt like to be lost and alone — Rabbi Yosef Dov Soloveitchik z"l. In the opening chapter of his magnum opus, *The Lonely Man of Faith*, Rabbi Soloveitchik echoes a pain reminiscent of the Cantonists:

I am lonely because at times I feel rejected and thrust away by everybody, not excluding my most intimate friends, and the words of the Psalmist, "My father and my mother have forsaken me" (27:10), ring quite often in my ears like the plaintive cooing of the turtledove.⁵

How awful it is, how invisible one must feel, when even his own parents cannot be counted on for consolation and salvation. Yet, this is the story

of nearly 50,000 Jewish boys whose days in the *cheder* were cut short, who were never called up to the Torah, who never had the chance to marry and raise families. Jews have been lost throughout our history, in ways we wish we could forget but never will. Let us add these boys to our memories and remember that every mitzvah we do, no matter how big or small, is one that some of these boys gave up their sleep, rations, and lives for. On this day, when we remember that we are still waiting for the Ultimate Redemption, let us focus on the one mitzvah that was so gruesomely tested in the Cantonist era: *ve'ahavta lere'acha kamocho*.

Endnotes

- 1 *Shabbat* 31a; *Parashat Kedoshim, Torat Kohanim*.
- 2 "The Empire Reforms, the Community Responds." *Jews in the Russian Army, 1827-1917: Drafted into Modernity*, by Yohanan Petrovsky-Shtern, Cambridge University Press, 2014, pp. 46-54.
- 3 These sermons are printed in *Yeshurun* Vol. XII, pp. 714-726.
- 4 R. Dov Katz, *Tenuat Hamussar*. Vol. I pp. 203-205.
- 5 R. Joseph B. Soloveitchik, *The Lonely Man of Faith*.

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SPIRITUAL HEROISM IN THE HOLOCAUST ERA

Historians, educators and curators offer many reasons to study the Holocaust. For Torah Jews seeking to grow in spirituality and in a relationship with Hashem, there is a special dimension to Holocaust studies: role models in spiritual heroism.

Role models inspire us to achieve greatness. The Torah consciously presents role models from whom we are supposed to learn and grow. By taking a close look at Jewish life before, during and after the Holocaust, we can be inspired by countless individuals of different backgrounds

and social strata whose devotion to Torah, Judaism and Hashem are nothing short of heroic. Unlike armed resistance, their spiritual resistance is a form of heroism manifest in personal conviction and unbreakable commitment to values.¹ It is a priceless legacy and a model that can inspire us in our generation. This presentation is a mere drop in the ocean of tears that is the Holocaust literature of spiritual heroism. Moreover, these acts of heroism help us appreciate some of the dire challenges that Jews faced during this time.

Pre-War

Rabbi Isaiah Wohlgemuth zt"l (1915-2008) succeeded his father as a Rabbi in Kitzingen, Germany in 1935; the subsequent years in Germany were marked by the Nuremberg Laws and anti-Semitic persecution culminating with Kristallnacht.² Rabbi Wohlgemuth captures his tenure as a rabbi in Germany with a surprising and enlightening description:

I have classified the years from 1933 to 1939 as another Golden Age in Jewish history. You might think it strange to refer to those years as a Golden Age...

Thank you to *Avi Mori*, Mr. Etzion Brand, Professor Leslie Newman and Mrs. Andrea Polster for their help in reviewing this article.

The most significant aspect of this period, however, was our ability to study Jewish texts and observe the great spiritual heritage of our ancestors. The political oppression of those years might have frustrated most people in the world, but it did not frustrate the Jews in Germany, who, in spite of all the obstacles, difficulties, and hardships, dedicated all their free time to learn Torah, in the widest sense of the word...

Suddenly, everyone in my congregation wanted to learn Torah Shebichtav (the written word of Torah) and Torah Sheba'al Peh (the oral law of Torah).

They also wanted to improve their knowledge of English and modern Hebrew. They believed that these languages would make it easier for them to adjust in the countries to which they would immigrate.

I was busy every hour of the day, and what happened in my congregation happened all over Germany. The most assimilated Jews wanted to increase their knowledge of Jewish studies. There was a tremendous search for knowledge that was unequaled in all Jewish history. Martin Buber, Franz Rosenzweig, and Leo Baeck, to name a few, were leading scholars of this renaissance of Jewish learning.

In the Orthodox community, the Munks, the Wohlgemuths, the Cohens, the Breuers, the Biberfelds, the Freimans, the Carlebachs, and many others taught Talmud virtually all day long. We did not think of the dangers ahead of us, and we continued on the path that we set for ourselves.³

Remarkably, we learn that despite the intense Nazi persecution of their time, many Jews, including those previously less engaged, embraced their Judaism and Torah learning.

Additionally, the pre-war persecutions brought with them a host of halachic

questions. For example, Rav Yechiel Yaakov Weinberg zt"l (1884-1966), who spent most of the war years in a German labor camp for Soviet prisoners, was asked whether it was permitted to host a concert in the sanctuary of a synagogue since Jews were barred from concert halls in Germany, and they sought the comfort and culture of music (*Seridei Eish* 1:12).

Kristallnacht led to the incarceration of more than 30,000 Jews in concentration camps in Germany, where hundreds died. In many cases, families received only a container of ashes of their relatives, and many raised questions regarding burial. In response to these issues, Rabbi Menachem Mendel Kirschbaum zt"l Hy"d (1895-1942) — author of the multi-volume responsa *Menachem Meishiv* — published a monograph called *Kuntrus Efer Serufim* detailing the halachos related to cremated remains.⁴

Wartime

After the outbreak of the war, anti-Jewish persecution intensified throughout Europe, yet many Jews continued to cling to their observance of halacha. The *Sheelot Uteshuvot Mikadshei Hashem* by Rabbi Zvi Hirsch Meisels zt"l (1902-1974)⁵ of Veitzin, Hungary, includes his responsa and those of other Hungarian rabbis during the wartime period that shed light on halachic concerns. One responsum deals with the use of unwatched flour for matzah due to food shortages (#64) and another regarding the time for women to immerse in a mikvah while a city was subject to a curfew (#71).

As the war progressed, the many

Eastern European Jews who had not been murdered by German Einsatzgruppen and their collaborators were confined to ghettos. The living conditions in these circumstances were exceedingly difficult, yet many Jews continued to embrace their Torah lives.⁶ One example is found in the writings of Zelig Kalmanovitch zt"l Hy"d (1915-1944), a leading religious member of YIVO Institute for Jewish research in Vilna. He describes Simchat Torah celebrations in the Vilna ghetto in 1941 in his diary that was written at the time and published posthumously:

Upon the invitation of the rabbi, I went on Simhat Torah eve for hakafot in a house that had formerly been a synagogue and was now a music school. The remaining yeshiva students and scholars were gathered there, as well as some children. There was singing and dancing. The commandant and his assistants were also there. I was honored with the first hakafa. H. K. [Herman Kruk] also came to see the spectacle. I said a few words: "Our song and our dance are a form of worship. Our rejoicing is due to Him who decrees life and death. Here in the midst of this small congregation, in the poor and ruined synagogue, we are united with the whole house of Israel, not only with those who are here today and with the tens of thousands of the pure and saintly who have passed on to life eternal, but with all the generations of Jews who were before us. In our rejoicing today we give thanks for the previous generations, the noble generations in which life was worthwhile. We feel that with our song today we sanctify the name of Heaven just as our ancestors did. And, I, a straying Jewish soul, feel that my roots are here. And you, in your rejoicing atone for the sins of a generation that is perishing. I know that the Jewish people

will live, for it is written: 'As the days of the heaven upon the earth.' And even if we were the last generation, we should give thanks and say: 'Enough for us that we were privileged to be the children of those!' And every day that the Holy One, blessed be He, in His mercy gives us is a gift, which we accept with joy and give thanks to His holy name.'"

We find another incredible instance recorded by Rabbi Shimon Huberband zt"l Hy"d (1909-1942), the leading chronicler of religious life in the "Oneg Shabbos" archives in the Warsaw ghetto. He describes how — despite a ban on shechita (ritual slaughter), which was a capital offense — a clandestine operation of kosher slaughter continued in basements at night by candlelight.⁸

Many Jews continued to observe halacha to the best of their ability despite the obvious limitations. This is illustrated by two questions published in the responsa of Rabbi Sinai Adler (born 1928) regarding his time in the Terezinstat ghetto. Prisoners were often given horse meat at a meal, which they ate for life preservation; must they wait subsequently until eating milk if they could? Due to a curfew imposed on the ghetto, people were forced to conduct their Pesach seder in the afternoon before sunset. Did they fulfill their obligation?⁹

Many rabbis provided spiritual leadership during this time of crisis in the ghetto. Rabbi Menachem Ziemba zt"l Hy"d (1883-1943) was known as the "Prager Ilui" (genius from Praga, Poland) and a leading rabbinic figure among European Jews. Until his death during the Warsaw Ghetto Uprising on Shabbat Chol Hamoed Pesach 1943, he was a leading force of Torah study and Jewish life in the Warsaw Ghetto. His incredible activities are

described in the diary of Dr. Hillel Seidman zt"l (1915-1995), who wrote:

Throughout the many vicissitudes of the Ghetto, Rav Ziemba's apartment remained a source of light, warmth, and encouragement. He had to move house five times — either because of the contraction of the Ghetto or for his own safety — but always his home was full of people seeking advice or reassurance. They were not disappointed. The wisdom and unshakeable trust of generations was distilled in Rav Menachem's personality; with his genius, he had little difficulty in finding the apt phrase suitable for each petitioner and every occasion. All his sentiments were rooted in Torah sources and reflected the eternal truths. He combined the ice-cold logic and clear vision of the Lithuanian lamdan with all the fire and warmth of Polish Chasidim, fusing the mussar and perspective of Rebbe Yisrael Salanter with the sharpness of Kotzk chasidus. The Nazi terror did not break him; he remained a beacon of light amid the buffeting storm...

Even during those terrible months of from July to September 1942, when the deportations accelerated to a frenetic pace, he never ceased his continual Torah study nor stopped producing new Torah insights. During our oppressive plight, he drew his strength and inspiration from the Torah...

I remember the Sukkos of 1942. Under extreme danger, Rav Menachem broke open the roof of his apartment to construct a primitive sukkah. True, it was a tiny sukkah, but thousands of people passed through. On erev Sukkos I received three esrogim from Switzerland. Naturally, I brought them all straight to Rav Menachem Ziemba ... Immediately, the news spread, hundreds of Chasidim and yeshivah bachurim crawled through



Rabbi Menachem Ziemba Hy"d

attics, tunnels, and cellars to perform the precious mitzvah...

He visited the clandestine yeshivos in Nalewki, Nowolpie, and Mila Streets — testing the yeshivah bachurim and spurring them to greater achievements. In the Mila Street Yeshivah, they would learn right through the night. Outside panic reigned, no one knew what the unnatural lulls signified, everybody feared what the morrow would bring. The gedolei Torah, Rav Menachem Ziemba and his talmidim, ignored this bitter reality to soar to the spiritual heights of Torah and yiras Hashem.¹⁰

At this same time, Rabbi Kalonymus Kalman Shapira zt"l Hy"d (1888-1943), the Rebbe of Piaseczno, delivered Shabbat sermons in the Warsaw ghetto to his disciples.¹¹ He taught Torah teachings to his downtrodden audience, combining traditional Chassidic teachings with messages about contemporary suffering and put these words to paper that survived the ghetto's destruction and were found by a Polish construction worker in December 1950. In one drasha, he reminds his suffering listeners not to become callous to the suffering of others:

We need to awaken in ourselves compassion for other Jews ... We

must not habituate to Jewish suffering, meaning the increase in difficulties should not obscure or dull the compassion for Jews ... And this is the issue that appears in the Gemara Megillah 14b that when King Yoshiyahu was in a time of difficulty he sent to Chuldah the prophetess although Yirmiyahu the prophet was in that generation since women are compassionate.¹²

From these examples and many others we learn that devout Jews continued to observe the Torah and rabbis continued to encourage and teach Torah through this period.

Concentration Camps

Between 1933 and 1945, Nazi Germany and its satellites established over 40,000 camps and other incarceration camps throughout Europe.¹³ Yet despite these ever intensifying hardships, many Jews continued to hold to their Torah observance.

Rabbi Chaim Yitzchak Yerucham zt"l Hy"d (1864-1942),¹⁴ one of the leading rabbinic authorities of Galicia, was asked by someone who had eaten non-Kosher food in a קאנצענטראציעניס (concentration camp) if the inmate required teshuva for this violation (*Shu"t Bircas Chaim* #42). The questioner was obviously so committed to his Torah observance that he was concerned about the effects of this unusual circumstance after the fact. Another example of

incredible aspirational commitment to halacha is found in the following question posed to Rabbi Ephraim Oshry zt"l (1914-2003), a rabbi in Kovno, whose multi-volume responsa — *Sheelot Uteshuvot Mimamakim* — has become synonymous with the world of Holocaust and halacha:

It was common for the cursed murderers ym"sh to lead the forced laborers to work in the dark of night before daybreak such that it was impossible to don Tefillin before leaving to work. They would work throughout the day into the night. There were those among the workmen who mustered the courage to clandestinely wear Tefillin as they walked once the day broke; however, one time the Germans caught one of the laborers while he was wearing Tefillin walking to work. After they tortured him with all types of torture they were not satisfied until they lacerated a cross into his left bicep — the place of the Tefillin — so that any time he were to expose his arm to don Tefillin people would see this sign of disgrace embedded in his arm. And I was asked if it were permitted for him to place a bandage over this disgraceful sign and place the Tefillin on top of the bandage so that onlookers would think that he had a wound on his bicep; does this constitute a violation of the laws of Tefillin [chatzitzah]?¹⁵

Perhaps even greater than this individual's heroic commitment to the initial performance of the mitzvah of Tefillin is his rededication to the mitzvah after the unimaginable abuse he had suffered.

There were, of course, many who did not follow this path of observance and many who struggled. On the night of the seder in the Kunin concentration camp, Rabbi Yehoshua Moshe Aaronson zt"l (1910-1993) gave voice to this challenge (*Alei Meroros*, p.145):

When I concluded the recitation of Kiddush and arrived at the bracha of shehechyanu, we all broke out sobbing, which continued for around a half hour. I spoke with those around and asked, is this not a blessing in vain, when the seder is filled with tears and sadness instead of celebrating the festival of freedom with happiness and elevation?

Death Camps

The Germans established six killing centers in Poland to execute their final solution. Even in these places — the literal shadow of death — many Jews demonstrated their commitment to Hashem.

Rabbi Yisrael Meir Lau relays in his autobiography that his father, Rabbi Moshe Chaim Lau, zt"l Hy"d (1892-1942), led the members of his communities of Piotrkow and Presov to the gas chambers in Treblinka with the words of Shema and Vidui (*Out of the Depths*, p.14).

Ya'akov Gabai, a Greek Jew and member of the Auschwitz *sonderkommando* (the men responsible for transferring bodies from the gas chambers to the crematoria), reported about a group



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of Polish *sonderkommando* who had a break from work on September 26, 1944, which was erev Yom Kippur. They organized siddurim and davening for Yom Kippur in their barracks above the crematoria (*We Wept Without Tears*, p. 200).

Just ten days earlier in Auschwitz, camp authorities separated one thousand boys in a designated barrack for death on Rosh Hashana. Somehow they knew that Rabbi Zvi Hirsh Meisels zt”l of Veitzin was secretly hiding a shofar and sent word asking him to sound the shofar for them in their condemned barrack. He deliberated and decided that even though it was against normative halacha as it endangered his own life, he must go and sound the shofar for these boys. He describes the scene:

There is not a writer or poet in the entire world who can portray my feelings as I entered the sealed barracks. It was only due to the miracle of G-d that my heart did not burst in anguish when I saw before me the bitter sea of tear-stung eyes. All of the children were screaming and crying terribly with burning tears and raised voices that ascended up to the heart of heaven. And they all pressed forward to kiss my hand, my clothing, and any place that they could touch me. They cried out these simple, but heart wrenching words:

“Rebbe, Rebbe! Oh! Mercy, have mercy!” Many of them I knew; they had been my students or my congregants. When I began reciting the verse Min Hameitzar, “From the straits did I call upon G-d,” they interrupted and begged me to say a few words before the shofar service. Too agitated by their overwhelming sorrow to speak, I was unable to move my lips or force my tongue to speak. In addition, I was afraid of the delay. It was getting late, the sun was setting, and the SS men could arrive at any moment.¹⁶

Post War

The end of the war dawned a new challenge for the survivors: rebuilding their shattered lives. One of the most active rabbinic leaders in postwar Europe was Rabbi Yekusiel Yehuda Halberstam, the Klausenberger Rebbe zt”l (1905-1994). One example of his unceasing advocacy for the physical and material lives of the survivors occurred in a remarkable, historic event.

On September 10, 1945, this Yiddish speaking survivor, clad in a tear-soaked tallit, spoke with the Supreme Allied Commander, General Dwight D. Eisenhower during Eisenhower’s visit to the DP camp in Feldafing, Germany. That date was Yom Kippur—the first after liberation. The Klausenberger’s request was a set of arba minim (four species) for Sukkot, which were flown to Feldafing from Italy under Eisenhower’s instructions. The previous night, the Klausenberger addressed his fellow survivors with an incredible conversation:

After Kol Nidrei, the Rebbe went to stand next to the open ark and began to speak, directing his words toward Heaven.

Crying bitterly, the Rebbe spoke not from the machzor in his hands but straight from his heart. In a wholly unorthodox manner he called out the words of Vidui: “Ashamnu, bagadnu (we have sinned, we have rebelled)...” Each word was inflected not as a statement but as a question:

“Did we sin? Did we rebel?” Almost accusatorily, the Rebbe asked, “Did we really sin? Did we really rebel? Did we, chas veshalom, rebel against You and fail to remain faithful? Gazalnu — did we steal? From whom did we steal in Auschwitz and Muldorf? Was there anybody to steal from?” ...

Word by word, the Rebbe dismissed each

and every alleged sin of the survivors. “We did not commit evil acts. We did not sin willfully! This vidui was not written for us,” he concluded, closing his machzor. His congregation stood in shock.

“But we are guilty of sins that are not written in the machzor. We sinned in our faith and trust in our Creator. Did we not doubt Hashem out of despair and hopelessness in the camps? When we recited Shema at night, we hoped it would be our last HaMapil, that the end of our suffering would come. How many times did we pray, ‘Master of the Universe, I have no more strength. Take my soul so I will not have to recite Modeh Ani anymore’? And when the sun rose and we were obligated to thank Hashem for ‘returning my soul with great mercy,’ we were consumed with anger and rage. When we removed the corpses from the barracks, weren’t we jealous of those lucky people who had died?

“This is how we have sinned. We sinned with a lack of faith and trust. We must beat our chests and admit our sins. We must ask the Almighty to restore our faith and trust in Him. ‘Trust in God forever.’ ‘Trust in Him at all times, nation! Pour your hearts out before Him.’”¹⁷

It is difficult to even imagine the level of emunah with which the Klausenberger lived, after having lost his wife and eleven children during the war.

Tragically, the scars of the war did not heal thereafter, and for some survivors it would never come in their lifetime. A halachic expression of this reality is found in a letter of Rabbi Yaakov Mordechai Breisch zt”l (1896-1976), a leading halachic authority, who escaped to Switzerland after he had been arrested and beaten in his community in Desburg, Germany

in 1933. In this responsum Rabbi Breisch is responding to the inquiry of a rabbi in New York, who turned to him for guidance in the following heartbreaking case:

A G-d fearing man cries before [the rabbi] about when he was walking [on a death march] with his younger brother Hy”d. When they sat down he told his [younger] brother that he [the younger brother] could sleep a little bit and he [the older brother] would watch over him to wake him. Yet as the respite lasted longer, he [the older brother] also nodded off. Suddenly, he heard the shout of “laus, laus” meaning it was time to continue moving. Yet the older brother was still not clear-headed and amidst the confusion he ran to the place in line he had previously held. When he remembered his brother it was impossible to return to him without endangering his life, and from then on his brother’s memory has been lost, as it is clear to him that they [the Germans] killed him. And now it is close to thirteen years that he has pains of guilt over this, and his soul is troubled, so he turned to the rabbi asking if he requires atonement for this or not.¹⁸

This question is an example of how even those who were broken by the Holocaust continued to seek a connection to Hashem in coming to terms with their experiences.

Coda

These spiritual heroes inspire each of us to strengthen our bond with

Hakadosh Baruch Hu. Their love for Hashem, evident through their devotion and commitment, can inspire us to deepen our connection and love of Hashem and our connection with Him.

While the Holocaust and its attendant theological questions remain unanswered in this world, Rabbi Yehuda Amital zt”l (1924-2010), a Romanian teenager who survived the war in a labor camp and later became Rosh Yeshiva at Yeshivat Har Etzion, reminds us to continue to remain connected to Hashem:

I turn to the Master of the world and plead: Look upon Your children; after all this, they still continue to pray! Believe me, on the Yamim Nora’im it was difficult for me to say, “You have chosen us from all the nations; You have loved us and desired us.” But I said it, and I continue to say it.¹⁹

Endnotes

1 The initial Knesset proclamation that created Yom Hashoah in 1951 acknowledged the heroism of active resistance, while its current formal name includes the second type of heroism, hence the title: Yom Hazikaron Lashoah V’ligvurah.

2 After Kristallnacht, Rabbi Wohlgemuth was sent to Dachau. After his release he escaped to the United States, where he settled in Boston, teaching Biur Tefillah in Maimonides Day School.

3 Introduction to *A Guide to Jewish Prayer*, Rabbi Wohlgemuth’s published insights into Tefillah.

4 Rabbi Kirschbaum zt”l Hy”d was born in Poland and served as a rabbi in Frankfurt,

Germany before the war. During the war he was in Belgium, and was subsequently transported to Auschwitz, where he was murdered in 1942.

5 After the murder of his wife and seven children the Veitzener Rav survived Auschwitz and emigrated to America, where he established a Torah community in Chicago.

6 Rabbi Shimon Huberband zt”l Hy”d, the chronicler of religious life in the Warsaw ghetto, remarked that with the creation of the ghetto, a new kosher eruv was in place.

7 “A Diary of the Nazi Ghetto in Vilna,” *YIVO Annual of Jewish Social Science Vol. VIII*, pp. 30-31. The diary of Herman Kruk also survived the war, and it is fascinating to compare the entries of Kruk, a secular leader of the Vilna community, with those of Kalmanovitch, a religious personality.

8 *Kiddush Hashem* p. 232.

9 *Dvar Sinai*, pp. 12-13.

10 *The Warsaw Ghetto Diaries*, pp. 346-349.

11 Rabbi Shapira zt”l Hy”d survived the Warsaw Ghetto Uprising and was murdered near the Trawniki labor camp in November 1943.

12 *Aish Kodesh, Parshat Chukat 5701/ July 5, 1941.*

13 [https://www.ushmm.org/wlc/en/article.php?ModuleId=10007872.](https://www.ushmm.org/wlc/en/article.php?ModuleId=10007872)

14 Rabbi Yerucham zt”l Hy”d was the Av Beit Din of Altestat before his death in the Sambor ghetto on Sukkot 1942.

15 *Shu”t Mimamakim*, vol. 1 #26.

16 Introduction to *Shaar Machmadim*.

17 *The Klausenberger Rebbe: The War Years*, pp. 185-189.

18 *Sheelot UTeshuvot Chelkat Yaakov* 143.

19 Based on a *Sicha* of Rav Amital zt”l on Asara B’tvet 2012, translated by Karen Fish. [http://etzion.org.il/en/you-have-loved-us-and-desired-us.](http://etzion.org.il/en/you-have-loved-us-and-desired-us)



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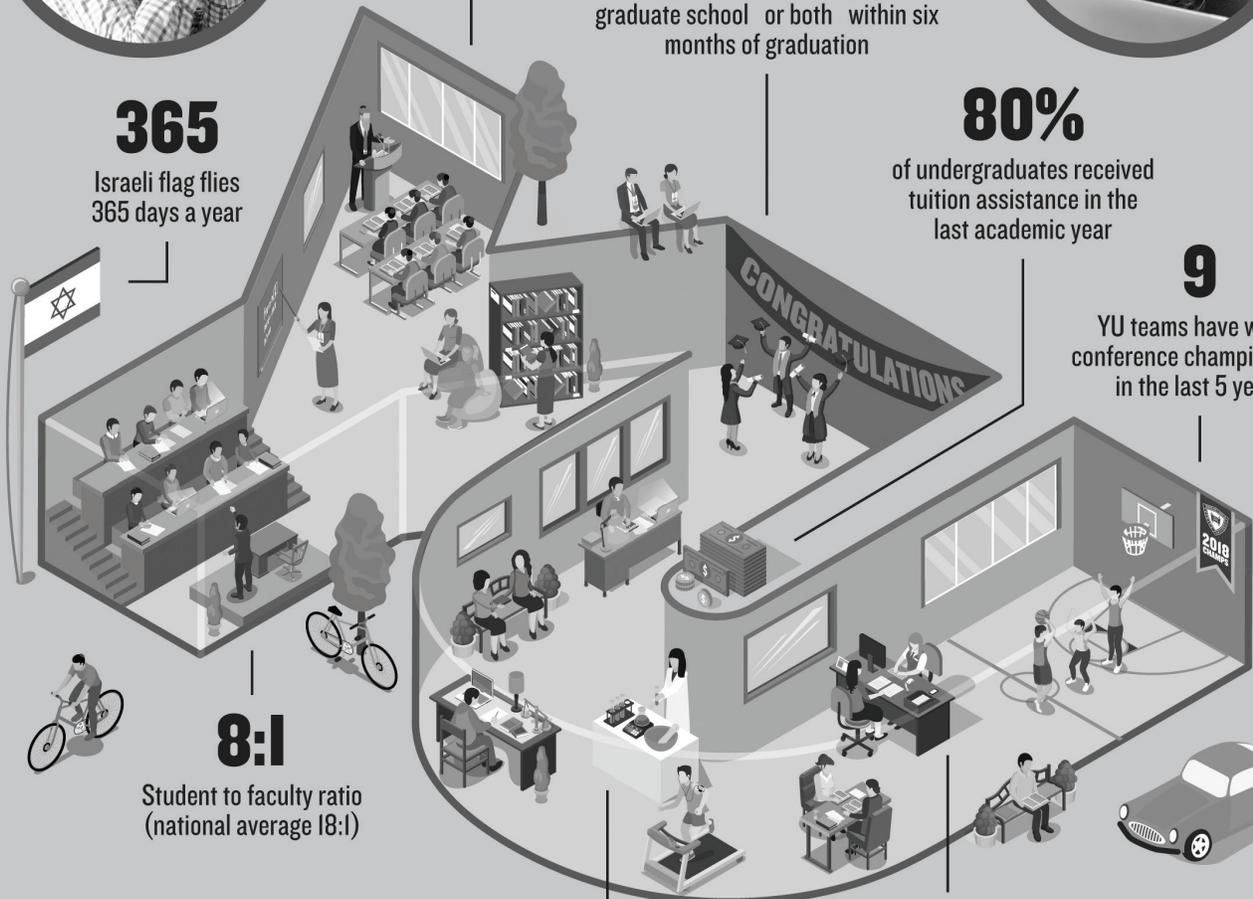


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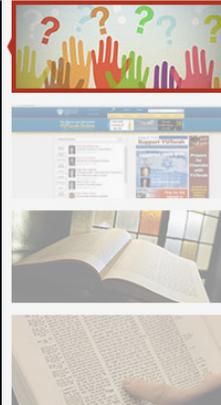
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